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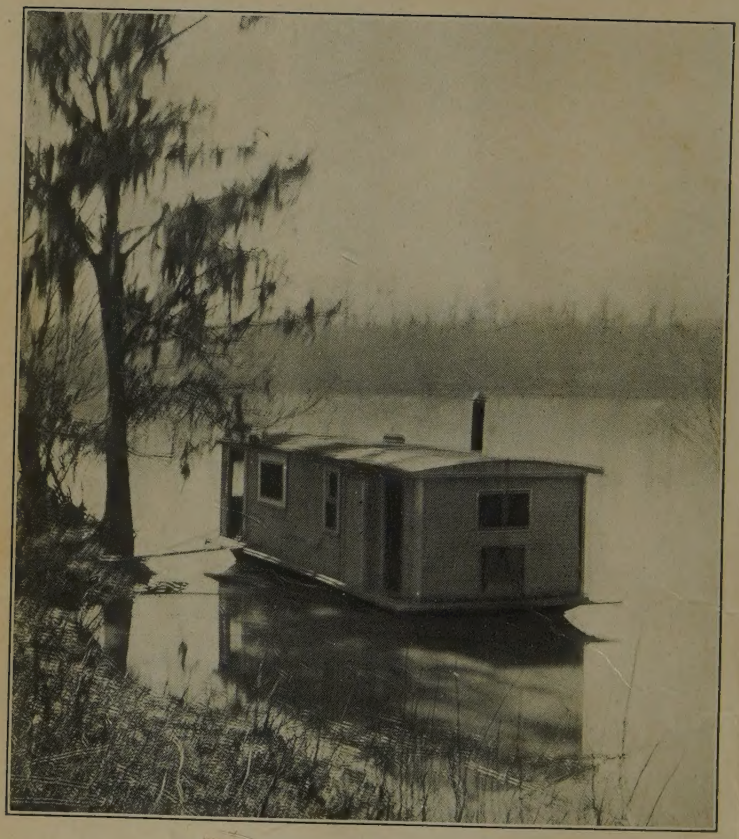

Time no longer mattered

SHANTY-BOAT

By

KENT & MARGARET LIGHTY

Illustrated with Photographs Supplied by the Authors

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INTRODUCTION

A GREAT many curious things are going on along the Mississippi River at this moment and have been going on there for the past forty or fifty years. For, being no longer very useful, it has slipped out of the public consciousness into a fertile kind of obscurity.

There was a time when it was extremely useful, and before that when it was romantic as well as dangerous. Well, it still is dangerous; it has always been and will always be that, in one way or another. But in the old times, in the times of De Soto and Father Marquette, and later of the desperately hopeful, sick immigrants from the south of France, it was dangerous on a more spectacular scale. And in the days of the determined and likewise often diseased Scandinavian and German immigrants, no more than seventy-five years ago, it still had undefined perils.

Indeed, it would be difficult to decide whether the Mississippi River was the hero or the villain in the drama of growing America. Perhaps, like one of those fascinating characters created by the most subtle dramatists, it has been a great deal of both. It was the artery of progress in the building of the West; but it was the haunt of pirates and the paradise of gamblers, it spread yellow fever and typhus and malaria, and it has worked incalculable destruction and horror in its periodic floods.

With the development of railways and hard roads for trucks and automobiles, the magnificent steamboat, all jigsaw-work without and gold-leaf within, came to look more than a little foolish and the river was allowed to lapse into its present comparative obscurity. To be sure, snub-nosed barges are still carrying wheat and corn, cotton and sugar along the river, in volume about as much as in the days when the Mississippi mattered, but in proportion to the immense total business of the United States, this volume is almost meaningless. There are hardly any passengers on the river boats to-day except on an excursion now and then in summer, or during Mardi Gras, on the lower river. No traveler could be expected to take the river seriously as an avenue of transportation these days; at best a trip on it is a lark.

Still, there could be no greater mistake than to count it out of the game. It is playing along now as it always has; and if an almost silent part has been forced upon it, there is the more reason to watch to see what may happen. Towns that boomed with the steamboat are dying on their feet. But as for the great desolate bottoms, with the passing of the last splendid packet the backwash of civilization inherited them. In a sense the river valley has become a frontier once more, the last frontier of those who will not live by laws other than their own, and for those who have broken laws elsewhere. These people have taken up their own mode of life in shacks and shanty-boats on the islands and along the sloughs and channels, and in their haphazard way they ply their trades of fishing and trapping, clam-

ming, moonshining, and running rum. This book will try to tell a little of their lives.

The river guards their secrets well. To the outsider it is a bewildering network of sloughs and marshes, telling him nothing except that here it would be easy to be lost, to die and not be missed. But those occasional strays who chance to come down the broad current in small boats of their own are not outsiders. They are accepted as river people. And so we and our itinerant shanty-boat were accepted.

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PART I

BACK VALLEY

SHANTY-BOAT

Chapter I

NEW WATER

"SO you're down-river bound, eh?"

"Yes."

"What you schemin' at?"

"What's that?"

"I mean, are you keepin' store?"

"Oh no."

"Peddlin' a cure, then?"

"No."

"*Jest* goin' down-river?"

"That's it."

"Well! Well, you got it soft. You sure got it swell. Jest goin' down-river!"

We entirely agreed with him. It was our first day on the Mississippi, and the simple miracle of being able to carry our household bodily over the water and watch the river banks go by our window curtains had been making it almost impossible to attend to the business of navigating the shanty-boat; for several hours the engine had been purring without sign of fatigue or temperament; all of our complicated mechanical arrangements seemed to be behaving; and October was just beginning. It was the kind of October day that is soft to the touch, and that means in Minnesota river bluffs of russet and gold and maroon on both sides of the smooth-flowing water.

We had expected to be alone with the river here, and had planned to spend a quiet half-hour simply gloating. But the incredulous gentleman was fishing from a log in the very pocket we chose for a sequestered luncheon. The food had been prepared and the table laid by a highly excited mate who couldn't keep her eyes on the bread and butter but constantly let them wander back out the galley window, on the part of the river that was being left behind.

"That little egg-beater you got on behind, there, does the stuff all right, don't it?" our new acquaintance marveled as we tied up. He seemed to be referring to the outboard motor bracketed astern. Then he added: "You handle her real nice, too. I was watchin' you, out there."

At this, of course, all barriers dropped from between us, and we showed him about the boat. He examined everything, asked a great many questions, and finally granted that he, a seasoned river-man, considered her worthy of the long haul to New Orleans. This, with his approval of our management of the boat, was sweeter music to our ears than he could have known. For the shanty-boat had been a fixture during our previous two weeks' acquaintance with her, and no one who saw her or who helped us make her ready for the migration had believed we could propel her with so insignificant a motor. They admitted it was a large one as outboards went, but it did look to them like taking the name of the Mississippi in vain to hope to bridle its currents with such a contraption. Therefore this first half-day's run was in the nature of a private triumphal march.

There was room for improvement, we admitted at once, but from the moment we parted the willows at Clarkson's Minnesota River Canoe Livery and Boat Works, just above Minneapolis, and saw the enormous "For Sale" sign astern of this neat little house-boat we knew her for our own. She was a tidy outfit in a new coat of gray paint and white window-frames, and with a cocky little stovepipe sticking from her roof. She was ten by thirty feet, and she had, as Clarkson showed us, a screened forward deck (or was it a front porch? We never were sure) with a long locker to sit on. There was just one room, and the galley aft. Her flat barge hull drew no more than nine inches of water, so she wouldn't be tricky to navigate over the wing-dams of the upper river and the sand-bars farther south. She had been towed here five years before, to be used simply as a residence.

She seemed, as we looked her over, the very thing required to give us complete isolation anywhere along the mysterious two thousand miles of Mississippi from the head of navigation to the Gulf. She looked capable of carrying us and the most important of our possessions down through the middle of the country, where we wanted to go, and of being our only home for however long we chose. We could see no reason why, with an outboard motor, she shouldn't give us all the transportation we needed in our desire for easy vagrancy. She was foursquare, and cumbersome perhaps; well, we were in no fever to get anywhere in particular, for time no longer mattered. She seemed to offer all the possibilities for an escape from telephones and taxis, from appointments and hurry, and for a

casual discovery of America. So she became our own, and because of her bulk she was immediately known as the Ark.

We decided to live aboard while we remodeled her, and, shanty-boaters now, we quickly became a part of the curious community that was Bill Clarkson's. His establishment was on the quiet Minnesota River, just a few miles above its junction with the Mississippi. He had a great square building littered with lumber, machinery, tools, spare parts, paint, and grease. There were a forge and anvil, electric lathes, and an engine to haul launches and cruisers out of water for the winter. All the people who kept boats there seemed to share in his shop and take turns at his work. It was impossible to tell to whom the boats belonged, for every one tinkered on all of them.

Our first night aboard, a cruiser larger than any docked there pulled into the landing. Some one explained. That was Hartley, a jewelry salesman. The river towns made up his route and he called on his customers from the levees. His family went with him up and down the stream. Then we knew that we liked the river and we liked this place.

There were other more or less permanent hangers-on. A sergeant stationed at Fort Snelling, the army post on the opposite bluff, kept a house-boat. He used it principally for cruising on the river and the connecting lakes, but he was a Southerner and dreamed of taking it down the river to Mobile some day. There was Thorwaldsen, who had owned our boat, now living in a larger and more elegant one in a secluded bend just up-stream. He had a good business in St. Paul; he

lived on the river because he liked it, even in winter when the hull froze in. And there was Walker.

Walker was a colored man who had once done a thriving business, gathering clam-shells for buttons, and in his day he had found an occasional pearl. He had been hurt in a fall, but he kept on clamming. It wasn't that he needed money; he had real estate in the city. But every morning he untied a heavy tub of a boat equipped with an old four-cylinder automobile engine. It was difficult enough for him to step in, but cranking the engine was a genuine problem. Nearly always he gave up the struggle at last and stiffly rowed to his clamming-ground.

At three o'clock one morning we were aroused by a melancholy voice from the dark, near the opposite shore.

"Kin anybody tell me where Clarkson's landin' is?"

Walker had been rowing home since dusk.

Two weeks were filled with the smell of paint and shavings and machine oil and with harder work than either of us had ever before thought of doing. Clarkson helped. It was with difficulty that we restrained him from tearing a hole in our proud hardwood floor, to install a marine engine in the living-room. For in his experienced eyes the idea of an outboard motor was childish. But we didn't want an engine in our living-room, in any circumstances.

"You gotta think of Lake Pepin, though!" he exploded at last. "And Lake Cooper after that, and the lower river! Lake Pepin's pretty tough water and you'll need power. She's wrecked steamboats, that lake!"

We told him to wait and see, and at last he was open, if somewhat dubiously, to conviction, though that shallow widening of the river which forms Lake Pepin still seemed to be on his mind.

A fine old mahogany steering-wheel had been discovered under heaps of rubbish in the loft of the workshop, denuded of numerous coats of paint and varnish, polished, and set up in the house-boat. A great many ingenious contrivances had been installed by Clarkson, prime among them the bilge alarm. This was an arrangement of corks and switches which rang a bell when two inches of water had seeped into the hold; so that if ever there was a leak, we should know about it in time to man the pump. There remained only to fashion the bracket for the motor astern and rig the steering-cables forward through the hold. The attention of the community was centering on us.

"That there hull's gittin' ready to make it to New Orleans," some one murmured, not without respect.

"Yeah, so they tell me. Hn! fine chance he has! Heard how he's plannin' to move 'er?" A contemptuous spit and a shrug between these river-rats settled our fate then and there—if fates can be settled in advance.

Then came the morning when Clarkson, having conscientiously completed the dubious bracket and buttoned the motor fast, was unable to think of anything more to do for us. He decided we might start. The news of the impending experiment, for so the rivermen insisted on looking upon our embarkation, spread quickly along the bank and soon there was a considerable audience at Clarkson's landing. Whether or not

the Scandinavian race was superior to the Anglo-Saxon was a question of no greater moment than the question of our engine's power to move the house-boat. Opinion was divided. Some said it would, but the greater number held that the idea was ridiculous. We were hoping for the best.

Clarkson gave us his last advice about how to tie up in a northwester and how to hold our own in the wake of a passing steamboat; and we made a last careful survey of supplies and equipment. The larder positively bulged and every one of Clarkson's contrivances seemed to be functioning properly. Several hundred feet of rope of various weights were looped over their spikes on the outside of the cabin, a forty-pound anchor lay on the guard, and an old automobile claxon to make the bridges open, Clarkson's farewell gift, was screwed on deck. The *Salamander,* our fourteen-foot speed-hull, to which we planned to transfer the same motor used on the shanty-boat, for short fast trips, was tied alongside, gleaming in a new coat of marine white.

The mate had done as much for comfort as Clarkson and the skipper for navigation. For within, the shanty-boat had become a microcosm of good living. As we looked at it now, we didn't know, but we thought perhaps we'd spend the rest of our lives as shanty-boat people. Everything was there, we thought, that anybody could possibly need for comfort. Of course you had to know how to look for things. It was all compact; but because there was only one room, and that a longish one, there was some sense of space. We had a good-sized desk, in the "modern" style because

this permitted book-shelves to be combined with it, and on these shelves we had some two dozen books, most of them tried and true. Gulliver was there, and Lavengro, and Tom Jones, some verse, and a portly book of history for good luck.

Along the wall opposite, there was a cherry drop-leaf table with a ladder-back chair on each side, and we slept on the double-width couch in one forward corner. A wicker chair and a couple of canvas deck chairs stood about, two small typewriters had their niches, and somewhere there was a portable phonograph. An oval rag rug lay in the center of the floor and a round one at the feet of the "Kitchen Queen of Minneapolis," our wood- and coal-burning heater. On the wall were some old Japanese prints of wild fowl and strange forest creatures. There were five windows, three of them very large, and with all of these open on the river and the sun pouring in, we couldn't think of any place we'd rather live.

And now the Ark was all ready to carry us off. We untied her and held her by the dock. Then the skipper walked aft to start the engine, trying to look as if it meant nothing to him. The mate was gripping the wheel. Clarkson took a pike-pole.

"Let 'er out!" he yelled.

The skipper bent down over the bracket and spun the fly-wheel. The engine popped once, twice, and broke into a roar. The Ark trembled uncertainly for a moment, as if the phenomenon of motion were too much for her to grasp all at once. And then she moved sedately, almost casually, from the dock. The mate headed her into midstream.

On the wharf, Clarkson, at the edge of a circle of open-mouthed river-men, was bounding up and down and waving his arms like a five-year-old.

"By God, she percolates! She percolates!" he chanted.

The skipper rushed jubilantly forward, took over the wheel, and brought the Ark about full circle so that we could see our friends once more. There were shouts, and hats were thrown into the air. At last we were passing down-stream. And then we heard Clarkson's voice above the rest again:

"Better pick your weather for Lake Pepin, all the same!"

Mentally we salted down this warning, for future consideration. At the moment it was impossible to think of anything but the one brilliant fact that we were under way. There was no knowing what lay between us and the Gulf of Mexico, or even how long we'd be on the way, but we'd started to find out. The Ark moved slowly under the great Mendota bridge, around the bend, and into new waters. We were off down the river.

It was dignified motion, at that. The shores went by at a most leisurely pace. But you wouldn't expect your house to hurry, and each willow that made its slow progress past our windows was a major event. The end of Pike Island came soon enough. Here the Minnesota River flows into the big stream and we saw the first of the channel marks, a little over two miles above St. Paul. The banks receded and we headed our snub nose into the father of all the waters.

Smoke thickened, buildings massed on the east bank

above us, we went under high bridges for trains and for automobiles, we passed a great industrial barge. Here was St. Paul. And all along the many small islands below the city, and on the tawdry water-front, there were shanty-boats, permanent shanty-boats, where people lived in rent-free, tax-free ease. Perhaps they did a lick of work now and then, or perhaps there was a still or two in those crowded kitchens, but life could make few demands there. Some of the boats were wretched and tumble-down, some were painted blue or yellow, most of them had fantastic outriggers and second-thought lofts and lean-tos tacked on somewhere or other. Some had potted plants on the window-sills and washings strung on top of the roofs, but in nearly all of them, as we chugged by, there were faces at the windows. So we passed on away from the city and down into the unknown marshland below.

This was wild country. On one side the bluffs rose steep from the water, hillsides sprinkled with maple and beach and linden, turning with autumn, with an occasional cluster of dark-green pine or a rugged outcropping of limestone. On the other, miles of impenetrable marshland, emerald frosted with silver in the morning light, stretched out. Here a blue heron sometimes rose, dripping, at our approach and arched far off across the swamp to the opposite range of bluffs. Now and then, after miles of utter loneliness, there was a shack, perhaps abandoned long before, clinging to the side of the hill; and sometimes a herd of cows straggled over the ridge, cropping at the lean grass and weeds between the rocks.

Where the river curved into a peaceful cove under

a break in the bluffs we stopped for lunch, and here on the bank was the amiable fisherman who approved of our outfit. He had taken us at first for river "racketeers," he explained, because about the only craft drifting down the river these days were those of the occasional itinerant photographers, peddlers, medicine-men, and evangelists.

"You'll see 'em," he said. "You'll see some o' those fellows if you go clean on down to the end of the river. Used to be there was a lot more of 'em, afore the roads was so good. But they're still on the river, some o' the old hands. You'll see."

And then we pushed out into the stream again and down the river until sunset.

The Ark came to rest, after her first day's run, beside a sand-bar close to a channel buoy. The marshes were lonely with dusk settling over them, and geese were calling in the sky. We looked up and saw them in ribbons, heading south. Far across the marsh a single light gleamed from the shadowy bluff, where some one lived. The skipper buried the anchor in the sand, and the mate put the kettle on.

Perhaps they had come from that single light, off there. For presently a flat box of a boat emerged from the dark edge of the swamp and creaked alongside us. At the oars—two-by-fours planed thin at one end—sat a haggard old woman in a huge sun-bonnet, and opposite her a tow-headed little girl. They seemed to be making straight for our stern. The mate went to the galley window and saw the old lady pull up beside the buoy and touch a match to its lamp. We had anchored beside one of the night channel marks and apparently

it was her business to attend to it. The mate leaned close to the screen.

"Good evening!" she said.

Nothing happened. Nothing but the creaking of home-made oars and the wide-eyed staring of the little girl. They got out of sight behind the corner of the boat.

"What did she say?" asked the little girl.

"I dunno," the old woman grumbled. "I didn't hear nothin'."

It felt like a wilder place than ever then, and we wondered what kind of people they were that lived in beautiful, desolate places like these.

Chapter II

STEAMBOAT TOWN

THE Mississippi wandered sparkling through the marshes in the early morning, we with it, and always a range of hazy bluffs rolled beyond the swamps on the one side of us, and a near sharp ridge above us on the other side.

Since time out of mind the river has loafed from side to side of the broad basin between the hills, and each new cut has left the old channel a slough which may find its way back to the new after miles of idle vagabondage in and out among large islands and small, through the swamps. Heedless, the river winds on down, cutting at a soft bank here and piling silt against the islands in another place; building up a sand-bar now and then for government engineers, repairing the channel, to cut away again, and for voyagers like us to keep a sharp watch for.

The towheads and bars may wash away in a season or two, they may change their shapes from year to year or become a part of the mainland, but most of the larger islands are there to stay, for their thick vegetation holds the soil against the push of water. Each flood brings them a new layer of silt and the willow tangles are matted thicker, the big trees add a ring.

The mate was perched on the guard outside, peering in at the islands as we passed close. In the first half-hour's run she had washed the breakfast dishes and put them away and finished her sweeping and dusting. Now, the housework done, she could take her ease till it was time to relieve the skipper at the wheel. There were maples and elms of tremendous girth, and some of these giants showed the battle scars of a hundred and more floods. Their trunks were still plastered with mud ten or twelve feet above the ground, where the water had raged a few months before. Some of the lower branches had trapped great nests of driftwood floating down with the spring rise and were holding them high in the air now.

The underbrush was a thick screen of tortuous vines, willows, and burrs. If any one lived in there, his footprints would never be found. He alone would know the trick of slipping through that dense growth, if he had a shack in behind there. He could coin his counterfeit, if he chose, or distil his moonshine. Nobody would know. And if he was a true river-rat, he knew the channel as no government agent ever did; and he would slip over the bars in his shallow skiff, where they could not follow. Even in the brilliant morning light it was a strange sort of place, fascinating but disturbing too.

Now the channel switched over close under the Minnesota bluffs and the Ark showed her heels to the long labyrinth of islands. The river broadened to a serene clear bay, cutting under the cliffs. The shanty-boat bowled along in the shadow, over swift green water. As we looked up now at the rock walls rising sheer and

They had done everything they could think of for the Ark

jagged above us, we thought of the old geologist Owen, who had traveled the river in the early days, on a voyage of scientific research, and had come home speaking the language of romance instead of the laboratory. The bluffs, he thought, were like "ruined castles, moss-grown under the hand of time."

> Sometimes [he had written] they present a curious resemblance to turrets, and bastions, and battlements, and even to the loop holes and embrasures of a regular fortification. Sometimes single blocks are seen jutting forth, not unlike dormer windows rising through the turfclad roof of an old cottage; and again, at times, especially along the descending spurs of the hills, isolated masses emerge in a thousand fanciful shapes, in which imagination readily recognizes the appearance of giants, sphinxes, lions, and innumerable fantastic resemblances.

Down under these rock creatures the shanty-boat kept plying its migratory way at the placid rate of five or six miles an hour. We held her close to the cliff-side when the government marks showed us that the deepest water ran there, and then veered obediently out between a red buoy and a black one to avoid a submerged sand-bar. Navigating the shanty-boat on this calm mid-morning was more of a lark than a science. To improve the channel, the Government had built wing-dams under the water, and these were marked too, to keep us from grounding upon them. They were long ridges of rock stretching out at right angles from shore, to keep the water from spreading out too thin, and often they were invisible just under the surface. All of the channel marks were numbered and listed, with their mileage from St. Paul and their local names, in a pamphlet issued by the Government.

A mark of one kind or another was nearly always somewhere in sight and it was only a matter of steering from one to the next. The Ark did as she was told; and it was not a miracle now, it was a sort of unassailable dream to be floating cozily along through the sun and shadow, over the still river.

There was Nininger Slough Day-mark, and then the town of Hastings; Vermillion River Buoy, where a stream joined us; Point Douglas; and, a mile below, the old steamboat town of Prescott, where the St. Croix River came in.

This was something we didn't want to miss. We'd tie, we decided, where the immigrant boats had tied up fifty and sixty years before and the great log rafts had come by up from along the St. Croix on their way down to the mills far below. But we'd stop just long enough to look around, and no longer. For Lake Pepin, our first hazard, lay only twenty-five miles below and we were impatient to try our luck.

The Ark crossed over and was moored at a small wharf belonging to a "boat works" where motor-launches were for rent and gasoline was sold. The proprietor caught one of our lines and made it fast to a cleat.

"Sure you can tie up here a spell! Stay as long as you've a mind. Glad to have you." He stood off and gave the Ark a comprehensive glance. "Headin' south, eh? Well, we get thirty below, up around here, most often as not, come wintertime. Don't know as I blame you much."

He stood studying the Ark. Then he walked slowly

back and looked over her stern, the engine, and the bracket by which it was fastened to the hull.

"How you figgerin' she'll ride Lake Pepin?"

"Well, we don't know yet," said the skipper, modestly.

"Well, I tell you. You pick your weather and you may come out all right. Can't always tell; Lake Pepin's pretty mean water. But if you're right careful about your weather, you may come through without a scratch."

His was the only establishment on the river-front now, but he was an old-timer and he had lived in Prescott all his life. He remembered days when it was different, when it was a boom town. A row of warehouses had lined the water-front in his boyhood, receiving the freight left here by boats going on up-river, to wait for other boats to take it up the St. Croix. This old weed-and-mud levee had been an important place then. Roustabouts rolled barrels out of the warehouses and up the stage-planks of the waiting steamers, heaved crates into the store-rooms, led indifferent cows and frightened calves down into the crowded bull-pens.

Passenger steamers came in those days, bringing hundreds of "immigrants," as the Yankee settlers were called. They came from New England and York State and Ohio, up the great river, to look for farm land farther west, for nebulous town-sites that had been touted in glamorous advertisements in the home-town papers back East. They stood on the quarter-deck looking over the rails at the crude, active little frontier town and wondered—with the first twinge of

misgiving, perhaps—if their new home would be something like this.

An excursion boat came, giddy with tinsel and gilded jigsaw, blowing the shrill whistle, ringing the bell to call the townspeople out. Torch flares burned over the black river as she backed slowly out into the channel that night, with her load of boys and girls. The piano and the fiddle struck up and the mass of young people spun, surged, and dipped over the floor as she made off down the river, and there was shouting and ringing of glasses over the magnificent mahogany bar. So it went until nearly midnight, when she tied up here again by the spitting flare of her pine torches, and tired boys and girls trooped over the stage-plank, across the mud levee, and home again.

A terrifying thing occurred now and then. Steamboats never lived very long; five years was about the average age. They were snagged and sunk; or the boilers exploded and the whole fragile superstructure with all its cargo and passengers was hurled across the water; or a sudden hurricane overturned them; or they were crushed in the running ice-floes in winter. Still, it was all in the business, as these hardened pioneers knew it, and the people who were bred in the river towns accepted the disasters so. Back in the 'fifties a passenger leaned over the rail of a steamboat while she was moored at the Prescott wharf. He slipped and fell, and was drowned in an eddy before the eyes of a dozen of her crew. Somehow, not one of them had been quick enough to save him.

In an old newspaper, printed at that time, there was a comment inspired by this catastrophe:

"The river is navigated, with but few exceptions, by a class of low-bred, ungentlemanly and sometimes ruffianly vagabonds, who seldom, if ever, treat a person with as much respect as a well-bred hound deserves."

This appeared in the "Prescott Paraclete" on June 15, 1855. But as George Byron Merrick, one of the grand old men of the river who still survive, explained in his "Old Times on the Upper Mississippi," the author of the editorial was a Yale man who had come out to the frontier only a year before. A tenderfoot. He hadn't got the hang of things yet.

It was a pretty well faded little town now, but there was charm in that; and then, too, it had a comparatively new source of pride. A very special kind of trolling-hook was being manufactured there now, and on the day we arrived the community was modestly celebrating the fact that the five hundred thousandth spinner had been turned out yesterday. They were carrying on.

As we scrambled down the bluff to our boat again, we were caught by a sudden gust of hot wind. Both of us stopped dead in amazement; such a blast was not in the calendar. The morning had been warm but not like this! And from all that the river-rats had told us, we judged that our bulky Ark could do much better without a gale.

Hurrying down to the dock, we found the shanty-boat pitching from side to side in whitecaps. The river was running whitecaps as far as we could see! The motion of the boat was highly erratic, for the wind seemed to be bearing upon her from all directions at once.

She made a mournful sound as she creaked against the dock, and the wooden cleats to which her lines were tied were being lifted slowly but steadily from their places!

The mate hung to the stern line while the skipper swung the forward line around a gaping plank in the dock. Then he lashed the stern to a post jutting from the boat works. There could be no more promenading down the Mississippi till the blow was past, and well past.

We went inside, over the gently heaving floor. The dishes were still intact, and in their proper places, too; and the pictures, slightly on the bias, to be sure, were on the walls as ever. Well, we wouldn't get to the head of Lake Pepin to-night, then; that was clear. We were wind-bound. The skipper closed all the windows to shut out the hot gusts, and we made the best of a dubious situation, pulled out some books and cocked up our feet. We'd have to wait and see what developed. Maybe it would be a storm, maybe not.

As we sat in the softly rolling living-room, pretending to read our books, there was a swish overhead. Through the window we saw a sheet of tar-paper curl up and drift into the river.

"There goes the roof!"

The skipper was on his feet.

But it wasn't the roof, it was only a part of it. He got out on deck in time to see that it was about a fifteen-foot strip, and that it was skidding rapidly down the river and out of sight.

Crawling about on the roof of the cabin in the gale, the skipper could now peek through an occasional

crack at the living-room below, where he had left the mate.

"Do winds like this bring rain?" she inquired, through a crack.

"Smells more like a young cyclone to me," he reassured her; "and they're dry."

"Oh well, then."

All the same, in five and one half minutes flat, we found a place where they sold roofing, and the skipper climbed aloft again with a roll of new tar-paper, cement, and tacks.

Dusk came and the wind still whistled around the corners of the boat. But it was cooler now, and so the river seemed less mysterious and unnatural. There was not going to be a cyclone. We were relieved, and made ready for bed. The motion of the boat had become a commonplace after the hours of afternoon; it did not disturb us much. And at last, some time after dark, the wind died away.

In a dim drizzle next morning the Ark pushed out from her mooring, innocent and amiable once more. We passed serenely off down the channel, through the rain, without a leak.

Chapter III

PIPPIN

WHEREVER a long reach of water lay ahead, the banks seemed to melt away, for the river was a mild and friendly surface now and the soft rain blurred its edges. But as often as not the shanty-boat found herself confined in short bends that left her close to the marshes. An occasional tar-paper shack, built high on stilts against the spring rise, stood wet and deserted by the water's edge; and now and then we passed a half-hearted farm on slightly higher land, surrounded with irregular cabbage beds.

The dim green miles slid under our keel and we saw no one. But once there was a wash of flannel shirts and overalls on a line, and a trail of smoke from a chimney. Fish-nets were piled on the bank and one was wound on a reel, to dry. Apparently these people, whoever they were, lived on the profits of the bass, pickerel, and catfish they could drag from the river and sell. It did not look a likely place for a road. Perhaps the flat-bottomed rowboat pulled up in the weeds was their only means of communication with the rest of the world.

There was hypnotism of a kind in our peaceful motion through the outer fringes of unknown lives, all this misty unreal day. We did not like to break it, and

so the mate prepared luncheon as we went along. We took turn about at the wheel and at table, and kept going.

The drizzle kept on, too, not getting any worse and not getting any better. We did not know what this promised for to-morrow. We had been told to pick our weather. We had no intention of being foolhardy, for what we had learned from one river-rat and another was enough to inspire respect. All alike seemed to fear Lake Pepin—"Pippin" they called it, justly enough—for the stories of the old steamboats wrecked in its gales and gashed on its rocks were told again with each recurring storm.

There the river widens to a shallow trough from bluff to bluff, occupying, for once, its entire gorge. Twenty-five miles long, they told us, and three miles across at its broadest. It has no current to break the waves. Wind can strike it from almost any angle and a sudden squall descends now and then without warning, to pile the water up in rollers. Moreover, instead of having a sandy bottom, the lake is floored with rocks, some of which jut up unexpectedly just under the surface of the water.

We had been warned that there was only one port in all the length of open water. That was Lake City, half-way down on the Minnesota side. So that if we were overtaken by a sudden storm we should have only that one slim chance of a safe harbor; for to tie up along shore anywhere else in a blow would mean to be beaten to fragments on the rocks.

The toll of the lake has been so heavy, though, that government engineers have lately built dikes of riprap

close to the shore, here and there, to break the force of the waves. Behind these a boat might take temporary refuge, unless the water happened to be high enough to cover the little sea-walls. And just to make it more interesting to us, our river friends had told us that the water was over the dikes now. They wouldn't do us any good.

The fate of the *Sea Wing,* forty years before, was still a vivid memory along the river banks. An excursion steamer, she headed up the lake on a gloomy summer afternoon with a deep load of men, women, and children. The captain should have seen that the gale was due; he should never have set out, it was said; but his passengers were impatient to be on their way and he risked it. The sudden explosive rush of wind caught her about midway of the lake and she was turned on her side, her passengers flung into the running sea. Some clung to the hull, but she was turned over once more—bottom up, this time.

Next morning the newspapers were almost unanimously denouncing the captain.

"Some two hundred excursionists were precipitated instantly into a boiling waste of waters," one of them wrote.

"Lake Pepin . . . is noted for its ugly seas whenever swept by a wind of any violence. So well understood is this that every careful sailor keeps an eye upon the heavens when he ventures out in the staunchest craft. . . . The light steamer was in the merciless grasp of wind and wave."

Ninety-nine lives were lost that day.

So we two were agreed we'd wait for good weather.

Like the old steamboats, the Ark was of shallow draft and rather high above the water, and we had no intention of running such a risk as the *Sea Wing* ran. We were in no hurry. We'd wait a week if we had to!

But we did want to get down close enough to have a look at this old jinx, and the sooner the better. We were coming now to the picturesque town of Red Wing, cupped in blocky hills tawny with October. This was once the classic stopping-place for boats about to run the lake. Here they used to spend the last night, examining their engines and their hulls, making eleventh-hour repairs. But the lake was still six miles below the town and we wanted to come as close as we could to-day. We passed on by.

A deep-blue dusk was settling over us as we passed a channel mark listed as Lake Pepin Head Light.

Well, then. Head of Lake Pepin. We peered through the gloom, but we saw nothing except the murky water stretching out a little way before us, moving softly under the rain. The lake was here, just below us, even if we could not see it.

We were satisfied. The skipper ran the shanty-boat through a narrow neck of water and down into a protected cove—the last, perhaps, on the whole lake. Dark came quickly and we could only guess at the open water lying ahead. But if to-morrow were clear, we'd see all there was. To-morrow must be clear! And still.

We went to sleep.

A roaring motor shot us from bed in blank amazement. The dreaming silence of our mooring-place was split wide apart. Peering from the window, we saw nothing but dim water and drooping trees close by.

Suddenly a blinding search-light was turned upon us. We backed from the window, and for a moment everything in two sharp patches of the room was bright as day. We stared in each other's faces, suddenly evoked from darkness. Then the light went out, and something thundered by over the vague water.

Out on deck, we could see nothing. Law or no law, she carried no running-lights, that craft. Defiant noise without shape—that was all she was.

A rum-runner, perhaps. We didn't know. Two others like the first roared by our mooring that night. A tremendous consignment of illicit goods must be going down the lake.

It was a nervous night and we awakened early. In the moment or two of rubbing sleep from our eyes it dawned on us what had waked us now: it was that the boat rocked gently under us and rain was pattering on the roof.

Outside, it was gloomy still but gray now. The water was dim for miles and miles, it seemed, all below us and far, far across. This, then, was the lake. This interminable expanse of dreary water; restless water heaving gently under the wind.

Wind! Well, so it was. A chill north wind, too, that was driving ducks and geese southward in great anxious flocks. We stood forlornly looking across the little bay and out over the dark, forbidding surge of the open water beyond, and we thought of winter. The gleaming Indian-summer days seemed definitely over. There was a touch of ice in the wind.

The mate turned in with a little sigh and slowly began to make breakfast. There was no use hurrying,

for we'd be here a while—a long while, perhaps. Until the lake cleared.

But the skipper had been studying the sky attentively. Now he came in with wind-stung cheeks and sparkling eyes. He was rolling up his sleeves. And he argued that the wind was favorable to us. It was infinitely better than no wind at all! For, he explained triumphantly, since the Ark drew only nine inches, and rose nearly as many feet above the water, we could actually *sail* through the lake!

Talk about picking your weather! It was made for us, he said.

It sounded logical. But it sounded too logical, as if there must be a catch in it somewhere. Things didn't happen that way. For the mate was thinking of the *Sea Wing*. She was determined, though, not to be afraid so long as the skipper was not. On this voyage there were to be no concessions made to the feminine part of the crew.

She added two more spoonfuls of ground coffee and served up an inky brew. The skipper threw an extra pine knot on the stove and the gang-plank was hauled in. The shanty-boat thrust its front porch out of the bay, and edged cautiously around the sheltering point.

A wide expanse of murky shifting water lay before us. Far off to the left, terrifyingly far after the intimacy of the river channel, we saw a hazy ridge of bluffs. And then, almost as far as we could see ahead of us, they curved in until they seemed to meet the opposite bluffs, for the lake was divided almost equally in two great lobes.

We hesitated which way to pick a course over all

this water, for here there were no channel marks, there was no channel. The protecting dikes were submerged and neither shore promised shelter. But this was to be a sailing trip. Well, then, the more wind we got, the better. So the skipper headed the shanty-boat out into the middle. And now we were alone on sullen rolling water and the shores on both fringes were dim. The boat no longer seemed a sturdy bulwark between us and the water; it was light and precarious and uncertain.

But gradually, as we rode along, the knowledge began to dawn on us that we were making it, all right. The wind seemed to grow a little heavier, the waves thrust under the hull with a little more force out here, but the motor purred on and we rode them down. We were making progress, even as we rolled forward and back. Wind and slanted rain and cold, cold water inclosed us on every side, but in here it was warm enough. The skipper was keeping the stove well stocked with wood and we were snug. We felt that we were alone in the little glowing center of a dreary world.

Steering a bee-line down the middle of the lake, we were easier now and began to look about us. It was the skipper who first recognized Maiden Rock. He identified it from a description we had been reading in a curious old book, "Thrilling Scenes among the Indians," by T. W. Nelson:

> Maiden Rock is a peculiar freak of nature. It appears to have been shot up from below and then squared by the compass. The surroundings are wild and weird, with a few straggling, stunted trees, and it seems to be a fitting place for the

spirit of the Indian girl to roam with her lover, as it is alleged she does.

And so it did seem to us, even so far across the water. We gazed regretfully as it passed behind us, for we had been bewitched by the author's charming acceptance of an Indian legend which such skeptics as Mark Twain snickered at. It was far too romantic and wild a tale to be snickered at; it should, we felt, be taken on faith. What if other Indian maidens were alleged to have leaped from other rocks all the long length of the river, to avoid other unwelcome lovers? On this bitter morning we felt as Mr. Nelson had felt. The wild tale was true; the incident had occurred here. Frankly, we were not much impressed by the evidence he gave to its veracity, but he had caught the spirit of the thing, besides:

> The high uplifts or rocks, their grotesque character, the dark ravines, the diversified scenery which marks the border of the river, with the grand river itself, makes a ride on the broad bosom of the Father of Waters not only delightful but deeply interesting to the lover of romance. . . .
>
> About midway of Lake Pepin can be seen a prominent peak, well known as Maiden Rock, and here is the point from whence an Indian maiden precipitated herself four hundred feet to the base below, rather than marry a man she did not love. Most Indian legends partake of the fabulous . . . but it is a fact that an Indian girl did throw herself from this rock, and for the reason already given, but it is not a fact that it was an Indian she loved, but a Frenchman. John Bush, eighty three years of age, writes as follows:
>
> "Now, as for Maiden Rock being a legend, it is a mistake. It was a real thing and no legend. The man who wanted to marry the girl was a young Frenchman. He was killed by lightning. I saw him ten minutes after he was killed."
>
> So this legend or romance passes out of fiction into reality.

Well, we didn't much care whether the hated suitor was a Frenchman or a magnificent brave. Only, we believed that the girl had hurled herself into the water—on a day much like this, most likely—and with Mr. Nelson we thought it probable that her spirit was roaming now in that "wild and weird" place.

Now the lake tapered down and we passed into its second, longer lobe. Far off, on the shore, we made out a dim blur that must be the village of Stockholm. It had no harbor; we had been warned of that. Still, we let it go by with some regret. Fort St. Antoine, they used to call it long ago, much earlier than the days of the desperate Indian girl, and then there were great things going on here. For a group of the earliest French explorers, having built a temporary fort at Prairie du Chien, farther down the river, had at this place taken possession of the upper Mississippi Valley, in the name of their king. In their shallow dugouts they had exposed themselves to the river, then to this dangerous lake, to make the mammoth claim.

In a sense it was a very old country, this great valley. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries French and Spanish forts and trading posts were dotted through the Wisconsin and Illinois wilderness. It was allowed to lapse, between claims and counter-claims of haggling European nations, and now a new Middle West, having derived much later from the overflow of the Atlantic seaboard States, was scarcely aware of its glamorous past.

But it was no time for us to stop and visit the place where the French had made their bold claim. We had ourselves to look after: the rising wind was beginning

It was a good place to live

to fleck the lake with whitecaps and we had to keep an apprehensive eye on increasing waves. The shanty-boat was literally bobbing along and the wind, whistling around the eaves, blew spray across the porch.

As we listened we had our misgivings again. To be sure, the wind actually seemed to be compensating for the absence of current, just as the skipper had expected, and, however we rolled, we seemed to be going almost as fast as we had in the narrow river. But so much depended on the motor. Perhaps we ought not to be taxing it so hard.

Just as we were wondering, there came an opportunity to make a choice, the only opportunity we'd have. We drew down opposite Lake City, the one haven on the lake. We stood gazing at it, far across the water, for a moment. But this meant that we were half-way through. And if the Ark had ridden it out so far, she ought to be able to do as much again. Yes and she would! We passed Lake City by as if it didn't exist.

It was now—now that we had cut ourselves off from all hope of shelter, now that we had taken on the wind and the rolling, jerking water for all they were worth —that it occurred to us that there was no other boat on the lake! We had passed no craft at all to-day. The skipper took the glass and gazed over the water. No, we were quite alone out here. The lake was deserted. The only living things besides ourselves to venture out were the wild geese pointing south. Well, then . . . perhaps, after all, we were foolhardy.

A great roller smashed against the boat and shocked it from stem to stern. But still we were pushing ahead. And the steady purr of the motor, the warmth of the

stove lulled our doubts. We were keeping on. The skipper looked up.

"Whoever said an outboard couldn't push this boat?"

But this seemed a little too much to the mate, who was inclined to be superstitious. She looked severe and made a remark about pride going before something or other.

And then, as though a disciplinary god had ordered it for the correct moment, it happened. We had set the stage for it too beautifully; the skipper had all but asked for it. At that precise moment the purring at our stern missed once or twice. The engine spat several times, popped, and was silent.

Sidewise went the Ark, into the trough of the wave. Pictures swung out from the walls and slapped back. A tea-pot skidded to the edge of the table and clung there. Doors flapped like the wings of a dying chicken. The storm had us now and we could make no answer.

The skipper flung back through the pitching boat, to the guard beside the engine. Wave after wave slopped over him as he wrapped the starting-cord around the fly-wheel, snapped it back, wound it round again. But never a single friendly pop answered him from the cylinders.

Then he had an idea. He looked into the gasoline tank!

One glance and he was racing forward through the boat again for the red can on the front porch. Gasoline! The tank was dry.

In all this breath-taking activity, there seemed to be nothing for the mate to do. Nothing but to sit and hold

the useless steering-wheel. With an outboard motor, of course, steering is accomplished by turning the entire engine, propeller and all. When the motor is still, there is no rudder and no steerage way. The mate was sitting there so that if the engine should suddenly start again, she would be ready to head the Ark out of the trough and across the waves once more. But in every crisis something must be done. Anything. So she darted over to the table and drank an inch of tea out of each of two cups which had been standing there. To keep them from slopping over. Then back to the wheel.

Suddenly there was a series of explosions aft, and a tug on the steering-wheel! For as soon as the engine was refueled it was quite ready to go on with the job.

We loved that droning sound now, and we prayed that it would hold out until the lake was run. There mustn't be any more slips about refueling at the right time! The motor was purring innocently again as if nothing had happened, and the skipper, having changed to dry clothes, was confident once more. The slanting rain struck us to starboard now, for the wind had shifted ever so slightly, but we were still luffing along in its path just as he had planned. And, however it stormed outside, the shanty-boat cabin felt safe and warm.

The skipper began to grin. He came and stood beside the mate, who was at the wheel, her eyes intent on the water, delicately guiding so that the boat should meet each wave at just the right angle. Else we might be swung into the trough once more. For there was always, at the back of her mind, the

thing that had happened to the *Sea Wing*. But the skipper laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Well, old dear, we're fooling 'em, I guess. We're running Lake Pepin in a northwester."

But she was more superstitious than ever now and she did not raise her eyes.

"We aren't through yet. And he who grins last . . ."

The Ark did undeniably have a sea-going motion. Heading directly down through the middle of the lake, we took the rollers as they came—or, rather, they took us—and so the shanty-boat heaved and rolled the length of each successive wave. Whatever there was, we got the full force of it. But we were heading evenly and steadily and we kept on going, and that was all that mattered. The rain was beating on the roof, but we didn't much care; we were grinding down the lake.

Still, it was beginning to be something of a strain. After all, it told on our nerves. We had been pushing our course across the stormy water for nearly three hours when, far off through the blowing rain, we thought we saw a point of land ahead. It looked as if it might be the end of the lake, down there. There was a detailed map and the government-light list to figure it by, and we decided that was what it was. That was what it must be. So this became our steering-point. And now if the waves poured an occasional bucketful or two upon the deck, or a swift sudden burst of wind threatened to swerve the shanty-boat about, we scarcely noticed, for our eyes were fastened on the point and nothing was to keep us from it.

We timed ourselves. And it took the Ark exactly two and a half hours to come close enough so that we

could distinguish one bright maple-tree from the next on that point.

Here it was that we saw the only other craft on the lake that day. A businesslike cruiser thrust its deep prow around the point, headed up the lake. And as we passed, its skipper seemed to recognize what the pitching shanty-boat had been going through. For he leaned far out from a port-hole and waved his cap in the rain. Good for the old Ark!

We rounded the point.

And we had been right! Here, like a miracle, was still water. Here were neighborly banks, a mere two thousand feet or so apart. The great basin of the lake was emptying into a narrow channel and the current was incredibly swift. A mile or two down below us we saw a railroad bridge and a scattering of buildings beside it. That would be Reeds Landing.

The mate hesitated by the skipper's side.

"Now you can say it," she told him. "You can say we ran the lake or anything else you happen to think of. Like, for instance, 'It's a pretty good old shanty-boat' or 'It's a pretty good skipper'—or anything."

Then she went and started a fresh pot of tea.

Words cannot tell how the aspect of the world had changed. It was not only that a day of danger was behind us. What gave us a sense of peace was the knowledge that our boat and our engine had been proved and come through, and that our own judgment also had somehow made the grade.

As if it were not enough, the rain began to blow off too, presently, and one of those soft green sunset-times that seem to hang over the valley, reluctant to leave,

settled down. We moved over tranquil water that gleamed in the oblique rays of the sun—the first we had seen of it that day. So we passed by Reeds Landing. In the dubious morning it had seemed we should be lucky if we reached here by night. But now there was no need of refuge. We pushed vigorously on the claxon and the bridge-works steamed up to open a pontoon. The Ark sailed serenely through.

Well, if not Reeds Landing, there was the town of Wabasha, four miles farther along. But darkness still seemed to be holding off, and so the cocky old Ark, commanded by two skippers considerably puffed up, passed by Wabasha, too, and headed on down-river through the thickening twilight.

Rounding a sharp bend at last, we were confronted by a bluff that looked like a glittering Christmas-tree. Tiny lights, profuse at the base, straggled all the way up to the crest. This must be the village of Alma, in Wisconsin.

"This town doesn't know where to stop," the skipper observed.

We did, though, and we headed for the lights. We picked out the cracked stone levee with our spotlight, and made fast to an ancient rusted ring that hung from a block of stone. Perhaps sturdier craft had tied there in the old steamboat days, but we were not sure.

Chapter IV

DRIFTERS

THE red and black buoys stood out sharply, for the sun was piercing the air with stinging warmth, and we were completely absorbed in dodging in and out among them. At first we gave each a wide berth; but as we progressed, our confidence grew, and presently we were cutting the corners and grazing like a cocky duck past whatever dangers they were there to mark.

The government guide listed a flock of warning buoys below Richtman Light, but none showed up on the river, so we lined the Ark on Chimney Rock Light, a couple of miles below, and decided to take our chances on bars and wing-dams and run there in a straight line.

It was a mistake. We should have shied away farther from the Minnesota bank. But it was too late. The Ark came to an abrupt, grinding stop that sent us both careening against the forward wall. The shanty-boat had grounded on the end of Wing-dam 107. Water welled up behind us as the hull scraped painfully over the rocks, and then the propeller caught. Its sheer-pin parted and the engine, its resistance suddenly released, broke into a futile roar. Before we could shut it off we had drifted over the next dam and were

caught in an eddy, which obligingly sent us out into the channel again.

Seated in the trailing *Salamander,* the skipper was trying to mend the propeller as we drifted toward the bend where the river veered east. Turning end for end, we started around the bend. In one of the slow helpless gyrations we came so close to jolting the bank that the skipper abruptly stopped tinkering with the motor and jumped ashore with a rope. Carefully he brought the Ark to rest above the curving sand-bar.

Not until the line had been made fast to a tree did we observe that up the bank was a cluster of shacks—a fishing community, perhaps—and below us, on the down-river side of the bar, was a house-boat, nearly half sunk. Around this boat stood a cluster of men who were calmly watching our antics.

One of them came over to talk with the skipper.

"Havin' trouble?"

The skipper explained.

"Well, you ain't so bad off as this fella," the man said, jerking his head in the direction of the other boat. We smiled. No, we were still afloat, anyway.

"This fella was kilt here the other night," he continued. "That is, we don't know for sure, but it looks mighty funny."

Mystified and incredulous, we walked over to the sinking boat.

Probably every bend and point of the river has its own lurid past, and there is hardly an island about which sooner or later you might not unearth some weird tale. Sometimes it will be a simple horror story; or a steamboat sank here . . . or burned . . . or its

boilers exploded. Sometimes the yarns will be of heroism; often they are romantic, even mystical.

Usually these tales concern the past, remote enough to discourage picayunish investigation. But here, apparently, we had run smack into a yarn in the making. It seemed to be far from a complete story; and as things go on the river, all the facts probably will never be known; but as the years pass, it will gather embellishments in fancy until the children of the next generation can be frightened into staying home after dark, with the most minute details of the shanty-boat murder.

This day, though, was not in the traditional setting. The morning was as clear and sharp as the sheerest blown glass, and the sand shimmered wherever the sun caught the sprinkled quartz and mica grains. The sagging roof of the queer little water-logged cabin boat, the black figures moving restlessly about, stood forth in startling perspective. You could all but see around them.

Inside, it was the usual dingy shanty-boat. You stepped down to enter, but now the floor was standing in water. There was a table made of packing-boxes and covered with a smudged red bandana handkerchief. Upon it stood a cracked oil-lamp, a cup without a handle, and two greasy plates. Knife and fork were crossed, upside down, from opposite edges of one of the plates. There were a wide white-iron bed and a couple of chairs, and two lithograph calendars hung on the walls. The body had been removed by the coroner.

A bystander pointed out a small hole in the window, and said that this was where one of the bullets had

entered. It had gone on through the floor and through the hull, which accounted for the fact that the boat now rested on the shallow river-bed.

At first the man who greeted us was more talkative than the rest, who were content to stand around shaking their heads mysteriously. Our friend pulled from his pocket with some pride a small black note-book, considerably warped.

Most of the pages had been written with indelible pencil and the water had made them illegible, but the notations on the two central pages were done with an ordinary pencil and could be deciphered.

It was an apparently meaningless record of cities and dates. The month and year were lined up neatly opposite the city, in chronological order, beginning with "Berlin, 1908," which was followed by a few other German cities and almost all the capitals of Europe until 1913, when the locale shifted to South America. Berlin was noted a second time in June, 1914, and New York the following month. The only legible entry after that was Tampico and the month given was April, but the year was not noted.

"It looks like German script," said the skipper. "Who was this man?"

"Well, I can't jest say as to that. He never talked none to us here. You see . . ."

Now the others gathered around and all together they began relating the happenings of the week, now and then adding to our friend's story and differing with him on details. But on the essential facts, as far as they went, all of them agreed.

The most unusual thing had been the man himself,

for though he had come in here with his boat some weeks before, he had never made friends with any one. All they knew was that he had come from up-river some place. He had been dead for at least a day and night when they found him, and obviously he had died of a shot-gun wound, the charge having entered his right eye at close range. But he also had an ugly wound in his right hand, where a rifle or a pistol bullet had entered the palm and come out at the wrist. This was bandaged in a makeshift sort of way, indicating, as nearly every one agreed, that he had received this wound only a short time before the second but in time for a fairly good job of bandaging to be done. Better, it was thought, than he could have done for himself. Some one else must have done it for him. Could it have been the same person who pulled the second trigger?

There had been two people aboard when the boat drifted in, sometime in late summer. Every one conceded this, but some said the companion was a woman and others swore it was a man. Whichever it was, it had sometimes appeared in skirts and at others in overalls. No one had seen this second person at close range, and the dead man himself had been in the village only two or three times, to buy tobacco, flour, and salt. He had not encouraged friendly overtures.

By the time his body was discovered his companion had disappeared. This in itself was perplexing, for the shanty-boat had not towed any skiff in which to slip quietly away down the river, and if the person had walked, he (or she) must certainly have been seen by some one.

The coroner came over from the county-seat espe-

cially to conduct an investigation. But he found so little tangible evidence and such an abundance of speculation on the part of the townsfolk that he hastily called a jury, suggested a verdict of homicide by person or persons unknown, got it, and ordered the man buried immediately as William McSiefert. It was just another river affair, and he was glad to call it closed and go back home.

In a larger community the question would have caused a ripple in the day's news and been forgotten. But a small fishing settlement does not have much to talk about except the arrival and departure of the evening train. Once aroused, its deductive impulses could not be subdued by a mere coroner's verdict. Splashing about the deep end of the shanty-boat, our enterprising friend had uncovered the old note-book and excitement had reached another peak. Some one suggested calling the coroner again, but a wiser head pointed out that, after all, these places and dates meant little in themselves.

Then a villager who had been away for a few days, taking a barge-load of clam-shells to the button factory, returned. After hearing all the versions of the big story and thrashing out its utmost possibilities, as they all sat around the stove in the store, he in turn gave the gossip from down-stream. He remarked incidentally that the big Dutchman over on the island had pulled South at last.

"Say, I seen him th'other night, 'bout a week ago," said a boy from the outer edge of the circle. "I was a-huntin' coon and the dogs was in full bell, a-comin' up the river right smart. I was back in the coulée and

I come down to the river then, figurin' they'd tree him somewheres near here. I took the blind off my lantern as I was climbin' through the fence down there by the clump o' willows. And the Dutchman jumps right up in front o' me like he was scairt out o' his growth. He had a gun with him and I reckoned he was a-figurin' to git my coon, but he said like he had some traps laid there and he was headin' the dogs off'n 'em."

Well, our friend with the note-book saw it all then. That was all he had needed. This was the way: The fella who was dead—his name wasn't McSiefert at all. Who ever heard of a "Mc" goin' with such a name as Siefert? No sir, he was a German, same as the Dutchman, and his real name was most likely Von Siefert.

What did anybody know about the Dutchman, anyhow? He had just showed up a couple o' years after the war, comin' here in the summer and pullin' South every fall. What did he live on? He hardly ever fished and he didn't make hootch. You could tell he wasn't a river-rat, by the way he carried himself. There was somethin' fishy about him, all right. Why did he wear that heavy beard all the time? Anybody might pass up shavin' for a month or so, but everybody shaved once in a while.

No sir, them two guys knew each other back in Germany, durin' the war, and maybe before that, too. Probably both of 'em was spies or they had been.

Then there was the woman, too. What was she doin' with an outfit like this? And why didn't she ever come to see the women-folks in the village? And she must have been a woman, all right, because a woman may

wear pants, but who ever heard of a man wearin' skirts!

Yes sir, it was clear as day. Them two, the Dutchman and Von Siefert, or whatever his name was, knew each other before. And probably the woman was mixed up, too. Maybe, when it come right down to it, the two men fought about her. One of 'em might have ruined her or somethin'.

Anyway, both of 'em was runnin' away from somethin'. Hidin' out. Did either of them ever tell anybody what their business was or where they come from or anything? Not them! They was hidin' out, all right. Some dirty deal they was mixed up in, back in the war or earlier. In some o' them foreign cities this fella had in the book. Must have been some kind o' schemin' goin' on in them cities. Well, and they just happened to bump smack into each other here along the river!

And then—well, each of 'em was afraid the other would tell or somethin' like that. About that dirty work back in the old country; or maybe it might have been South America. Anyway, they met here and the Dutchman seen 'em first. Because you know damn well he hadn't no traps set there by them willows. Nothing to trap there, and the wrong time o' year if there was somethin'.

So the Dutchman is sneakin' up on the shanty-boat with his gun the night the kid here seen him behind the willows. Maybe he gits scairt and does it the next mornin'. Anyway, he sneaks up and tries to pot this guy Siefert through the window, and he only wings him. The woman don't know who did the shootin', but she ties up his hand where the bullet run through.

But the Dutchman ain't finished yet. Knowin' he's hit the other fellow, he comes back and walks right in on 'em and blows out this fella's brains with his shotgun.

Then, you see, he tells the woman who he is and that if she don't beat it with him she'll git pinched. Maybe she's scairt or maybe she wants to go with him anyway, dependin' on just what happened there in the old country. So she goes, takin' her things with her. And they both pulls down the river. . . .

Our friend told his tale with the deepest conviction, and with a faction of the villagers he seemed to have gained a sort of heroism by virtue of his detective skill. Some one had again suggested calling the coroner, they said. But the older men looked serious and argued that they didn't know these people, and so what was it to them? Anyway, there were reasons for not wanting to have the sheriff and his like looking around too closely over the island. A fisherman doesn't make much money fishing. He has to have side-lines, and what they are is strictly his own business. No, they'd better not have any one snooping around here. This was a river matter. The authorities were satisfied. Let sleeping dogs lie.

Some one closed the door of the little boat and we walked slowly back to our own. Say it had happened as they thought. Or that in any case the man who now lay in the potter's field had been fleeing from something. With his companion, wherever he found her, he had been virtually burying himself alive in these marshy bottoms. Perhaps they had lived for a time on this island and then on that, up the river there, where we

had come from, slipping in and out through the swamps as the months—or the years—went by. Finally the woman had grown homesick, unbearably homesick for the sight of other faces. So they had drifted down to this tiny isolated community in the late summertime, to stop here a little while. But even now they were holding themselves aloof. And then something happened. They had come where there were other people to spy and speculate. Even in the little cluster of fishing-shacks, here by the edge of the wild gleaming sandbar, it had been impossible to escape. The thing was up.

Maybe the villagers were right about the Dutchman; maybe it was he who had found them out. Then, if the woman had gone off with him on his annual southward migration, perhaps we should see them down the river somewhere or perhaps we'd pass them and not know. Well, it was a queer business. It was what they said—just a river matter.

A "castle" was once built of floating remnants of steamboats wrecked in Lake Pepin

Chapter V

A SWAMP COOKER

WE found wild rice growing in the sheltered coves and stopped now and then to shake off some grains to munch. Sometimes at night we set a line baited with liver and had catfish for breakfast. We started very early now and again and ran all day through the sparkling atmosphere, lolling in the deck chairs on the front porch, complacently watching the brilliant Mississippi gorge slip by on each side. At other times we stayed tied up below some island, abandoned the Ark, and tramped through the woods where the squirrels were busily hiding away nuts and the birds were caucusing about an imminent southward trek.

Shanty-boating was a fine life, almost glorious, for there was an edge to this dalliance: winter was not far off. While the sun was warm, the sharp air kept warning us, urging us on. Well, the river knew its course; trusting to its drift, we should soon be taken below the frost-line.

Strange little towns lay along our way, mere clusters of houses pinched under a bluff or straggling up a cleft coulée. There really were two of each of these towns, the back and the front, the new and the old town. Down along the bank were the old abandoned

buildings, beginning to fall to pieces, that once were steamboat stores and warehouses. A few little hovels clustered about them and sometimes there was a shanty-boat colony just down-stream, where squatters lived. Then came the railroad track, the symbol of change the old steamboat pilots used to spit at while it was being laid. But the town itself was moved up under the brow of the bluff, and here was the new main street.

Trempealeau, in Wisconsin—*le montaigne qui trempe à l'eau,* the earliest French explorers called it—had had its day of glory when immigrants from the Eastern States and from Germany and Ireland tramped up the steep street and over into the fertile lands behind. Later the wild lumbermen, steamboat men, and log-rafters kept the river-front ablaze with their high jinks. Now there were hardly fifty houses and many of them and the stores were deserted. There was no new town behind the track.

Inquiring where to buy some adhesive tape, we were directed to the hardware store. Here a depressed pharmacist explained to us that he had to buy out the stock of the hardware merchant, who had failed. The drug business in Trempealeau was on the rocks, too, and his idea was to stave off the fatal day by combining the two. The only trouble was that the hardware stock did not leave him much space to display his drugs. Later we bought milk in a dry-goods store which had taken over a defunct grocery. The town was shriveling, sliding off the map.

La Crosse, a little farther on, was one of the two-town communities. It had been important in the days gone by, and with some of the others it would have

dwindled into a deserted row had not some enterprising citizens built a bridge across the river there. One of the first spans, it saved La Crosse. Some of the old town was still clustered on the river side of the railroad tracks, but the new town behind was a Midwestern city of small manufacturers and a few fairly large ones.

It was while we were tied up to the levee here that we made the acquaintance of Joe. His last name, like most names on the river, doesn't matter; we never knew it. Joe approached the skipper one evening as we were shifting the Ark to a better location. He was lurching a bit. He was not nearly so steady as he should have been, to attempt to cross the loose rocks. To his "Howdy!" the skipper replied, and was immediately offered the slightly milky contents of a bottle. With some fortitude the skipper took a bitter, fiery swig, and Joe became our friend.

We gave him a seat on the front porch and listened to a sad tale. His last "works" had been raided only the night before. Served him right for setting up on the mainland. The lay-out had been on the upper end of a point just about a mile above town. He hadn't been there, of course, when the government men came, but they took his outfit and, according to Joe, no less than fifty gallons of fresh corn liquor. It was the niftiest still he had ever operated; cost him around two hundred and fifty dollars. All copper—none of that galvanized wash-tub stuff for Joe!—it was a beauty.

The worst of it was he had been running it only a few weeks and had only just paid out on it. That fifty gallons would have been his first clear profit. Furthermore, he had been on a tout the day before and spent

all his money, counting on the fifty gallons to be cashed in the following day. Guessed he'd have to go to work now. He had a john-boat with a high-powered automobile motor in it: maybe he'd go down to Lynxville and get a job with the government fish-rescuers. But it was a blow to have to lose that new still.

Having told his own story, he began to ask about us, with some finesse but shrewdly too. For a moment he seemed uneasy, as though he had been talking too freely to strangers. But his good humor overcame suspicions and he must have decided we were river people.

Well, if we were going down-stream, he said, we should not fail to stop at the lower end of Battle Island, down by the Bad Axe River mouth. Just below, there was a towhead behind a submerged sand-bar, connected, by a narrow strip of land, with the main island. The towhead was thickly covered with willow shoots, but we'd recognize it by the big hard maple in the center. The water there was too shallow for the shanty-boat, but if we landed by the island and walked across, we'd find Chris's "cooker." If Chris was there, we must just shout that Joe had sent us. Everything would be all right. If he wasn't, we might just help ourselves and leave a quarter in the can under the maple-tree. Joe was in a glowing humor when he left. He would speak to Chris for us and we mustn't pass up Battle Island.

Next day we were passing by Victory, the little Wisconsin village that clutters up the mouth of the coulée out of which the Bad Axe River flows. The town itself used to be known as Bad Axe, but some years ago it

changed its name in an effort to gild a rather sordid association. The massacre at Battle Island was one of the most gruesome of all bloody attempts to eradicate the Indians. Here Black Hawk's tribe, women and children and braves, was annihilated. Presumably now the slaughter had become a "victory."

Black Hawk and his entire tribe had retreated down the coulée and crossed to the island, where they expected to make a last stand. The militia, outnumbering the Sac three to one, swarmed down the side of the bluff. By arrangement the armed steamboat *Warrior* came up the river then, loaded with soldiers from Fort Crawford, at Prairie du Chien. Musket-fire raked the island from both sides. Desperate Indians took to the water, hoping to swim to the Minnesota shore, and safety. But only a few ever got there and hundreds of Indians were wiped out before the last shot was fired.

Since then the river channel has changed, forming a bar to connect the island with the Wisconsin mainland. We coasted along the outer shore, following much the same course the *Warrior* had followed nearly a hundred years earlier. The island was as tangled and matted with growth as it must have been when the Indians sought shelter here. The shores were rimmed with late golden and scarlet flowers which seemed to reflect the bright leaves.

As our friend Joe had suggested, we tied at the lower end and the skipper walked across the sand-bar to the towhead. He shouted for Chris, but there was no answer. A faint path seemed to lead into the willow thicket. The entire island was less in area than a

city square, but the growth was so dense that you could distinguish nothing ten feet from the edge.

In a small cleared space under the maple, just as Joe had described, there stood a roughened copper boiler with a charcoal fire under it. From the end of a copper worm, clear drops fell into a five-gallon glass jug. A canopy of willow branches had been erected low over it, to kill any smoke that might rise. No Kentucky mountaineer could have done better. Nailed to the tree was a tomato-can, and a tin dipper hung above it.

It was easy to see why government agents so rarely found these lay-outs, why arrests were almost impossible. The high-powered revenue cutters are worse than useless, for the river moonshiners run their contraband cargoes in flat-bottomed john-boats especially designed for skimming over sand-bars, and submerged wing-dams too if necessary. They know the river as a blind man knows his home. We had heard them at night, roaring without mufflers, without lights. Suddenly then the motor ceases, the boat slips through the darkness with the current. It pushes up on the sand somewhere, deposits its cargo, and drifts away. Then the motor roars again as it dashes off to some other destination.

Should the revenue cutter pursue such a trail, the river-man's craft will dart off the channel and begin to dodge around bluff bars and snags until it has hung up the government boat on an old stump or a shallow bar. During the early days of prohibition there was more of this kind of pursuit than there is now; perhaps its futility is being recognized. While it still is the least obvious, moonshining is actually one of the more important river industries.

Not many miles below, we passed the southern boundary of Minnesota, and now Iowa lay on our right. As the sun went down we rounded a bend and the village of De Soto spread itself out on the eastern shore before us and we headed the Ark toward its sandy levee.

Before we had made the crossing the sun had gone down behind the Iowa bluffs, but it still touched De Soto, lighting its windows to fire and burnishing the rocky hillside above. A john-boat sputtered toward us, leaving an oily V-shaped wake that was shimmering gold and purple.

In his grave high upon the brow of the bluff lay old Chief Winnesheik. In the afterglow, when rocks and even the bare branches of the trees took on an unreal copper hue, it seemed the magic hour when the dead warrior might rise and survey his lost domain; then, mounting the horse buried with him for just such an occasion, again lead his braves to battle in the valley beneath.

We moored below his lookout. The founders of this town, named for the discoverer of the lower Mississippi, must have had grand notions of its future. By far the largest building now was the Bay State House, a four-story frame hotel which was once too small for the trade. New England immigrants must have had the naming of it. Now a portion of it was used by the village doctor; the rest was closed off.

The main street of De Soto was unlike most on the river. Here Main Street—in fact, the only one—ran up along the edge of a coulée, and its little buildings seemed to cling to one another to keep from tumbling

into the soft green hollow below, where cows were peacefully grazing.

One of the men who put in part of each year with the government fish-rescue squad which had its headquarters down-stream a few miles, at Lynxville, came and chatted on the levee with the skipper a while.

He had become a commercial fisherman, he said, because there hadn't been much work for the Government to do this season, as the water had continued fairly high throughout the summer. So now he was catching the same fish which he had rescued from drying sloughs the year before, and it rather amused him to think of that.

In the spring the fish spawn in the still waters of lakes within river islands, and along the sloughs, and then return to the channel, leaving the young to shift for themselves. As the river-level goes down in the summer, these quiet waters often dry up and are cut off from the main stream. So the rescue squads seine out the young fish trapped here and deposit them in deep water.

Next day we passed several of the small boats with which these crews patrolled the river, and a fleet of them maintained by the State of Iowa was tied up at the Lansing wharf. This was another of those old river hamlets that had not found new uses for themselves. Venerable warehouses lined the water-front, empty, and one old building, with its roof half caved in, still bore the sign: STEAMBOAT STORE, SUPPLIES AND PROVISIONS, but it had not been used for many years.

Down the line a mile or so was a small but still rather stately Greek temple—in prosperous days the court-house but now a hen-coop, fluted columns and all.

Chapter VI

RESTLESS PRAIRIE

AN assortment of ghostly buildings greeted us as we drew up to the levee of the old town of Prairie du Chien. Gradually sinking into the river was a battery of limestone ruins, windowless and beginning to crumble. Probably they had once been steamboat warehouses. Directly above us was something more pretentious, an impressive brick building that dominated the water-front. Perhaps it had been a hotel in the days when the warehouses were still in use, for the roof was flanked with rows of chimneys as if each room must have had its stove or fireplace. There was a widow's walk on top, from which travelers of the old times could command a full view of the river and any boats making their way toward the town. But now nearly all of the windows were boarded up. The building had apparently outlived its time.

We walked along the road that followed the river, without meeting any one. The only lights came from the railroad station behind us, and one burned dimly in a small gray box of a building with a shingle announcing that now this was the hotel. We walked on, to a house that looked much older than any of the others. Built of stone, a good two stories high and admirably proportioned, it was seated gravely upon an Indian

mound. At the end of the street there was a smaller building, also of stone. It, too, looked to be more than a century old—a great age in this part of the country, for it goes back to a time when there was only a faint scattering of white men, living in log shacks in the forest. We looked up and a sign told us that this building, whatever use it had served in its day, had become the Riverside Repair Shop.

The street ended abruptly at a fence surrounding a thick grove of trees. Behind them we heard water splashing and we peered through. In the vague light we saw, across rolling lawns, a number of buildings all clustering about a great house on a slight elevation. This, too, was dark and still. Water splashed from rusting pipes into two rock pools—artesian fountains at one time, perhaps—and this was the only thing that stirred. The dim shadows might once have been a luxurious estate, but they had been left alone for a long time. There was no one here.

We wandered back, and the road turned inland presently. A viaduct took us over a strip of bog toward an unmistakable glow of light. About a mile from the river, just under the bluff, we found the new town of Prairie du Chien. With the passing of the steamboat, there had been no further use in clinging to the levee. They had moved their main street back, across the marsh, to higher land, and left the river-front to its memories of departed grandeur.

Grandeur it must have been. In this picturesque basin, of so little consequence now, the feverish activity of pioneers of rival nations had once made things hum. For the little settlement was then the great fur market

of the frontier. For a long time French was heard more commonly than English. Gradually it began to drop off, but it never disappeared. Zebulon Pike, then a mere lieutenant, came through in those early days to make a dubious claim for a remote, uncertain United States Government. On the levee the frock-coats and beavers of visitors from the French community of St. Louis mingled with the uniforms of first British, then American officers; with crinolines and parasols from Pittsburgh, Louisville, and Philadelphia; with the blankets and paint of emissaries from the forest.

Here General William Clark triumphantly ran up the first American flag over what had been a British fort, and Colonel Zachary Taylor, later to be president of one republic, in command of its soldiers here now, returned rather coldly the salute of the future president of another, young Lieutenant Jefferson Davis, who was in love with Colonel Taylor's daughter "Knoxie." And always furs, furs, and more furs were heaped on the bateaux and the wagon-trains, muskets and barrels of whisky disappeared into the forest, and the music and laughter in the gay little village rose to a more enchanting pitch.

Before that, it had been a wild enough stretch of green, here between the river and the range of bluffs. From one of those hills, a little below, Father Marquette and Joliet, the white discoverers of the upper Mississippi, had looked down on a band of Indians playing lacrosse. A straggling of French traders followed these two, and gradually the little plain came to be the natural meeting-place of the fur-traders and the Indians. The "winterers," or voyageurs, sent out by the

Quebec companies to bargain with the Indians and trap, met with them here each spring. Whisky and muskets were their currency for pelts.

On their long canoe journeys through the Great Lakes, from the St. Lawrence country, the voyageurs made the best of their fare of dried meat, pemmican, and fat. But there, in the wild, casual fur market, there were now and then fresh vegetables and berries and an occasional wild turkey for a feast. What feasting they did then, the traders, the braves, and the squaws! Rum was a necessity in the winter; at all times it was a staple on the frontier. And so in the icy early spring, when the Frenchmen and the Indians came out of the timber with their pelts, there was a sort of crazy carnival of drinking and games and telling tales for the interval—a gay, gaudy rough-house of wanderers from all the ends of the wilderness. Many of the traders had their squaws for a season or two.

Then a white girl came to this place. Those were prehistoric days in Wisconsin and only the bare, almost incredible outlines of the life of that first white woman remain. But an occasional reference to her is made in the diaries of early travelers, and in the simple preposterous facts there is agreement among them.

One Cardinel, a French soldier, is said to have come to the little prairie in 1726, bringing with him a young wife from the St. Lawrence country. Just how young she was is unknown, but she could hardly have been more than a child. For she is known to have lived one hundred and one years after that. Her death was recorded in 1827, R. G. Thwaites tells in his "Story of Wisconsin."

The soldier and his bride proceeded to make a permanent home in this wilderness. They were the first to try that. All the others drifted through for the spring trading and drifted out again about their business. But these two built a log house and cultivated a truck-garden.

Now, Cardinel himself was a fur-trader. It was not for him to remain by the fireside in the winter season. He had to be out, roaming through the Wisconsin forests, following the rivers, trapping his pelts. His wife, however, remained at home, as the story is told. She stayed in the solitary cabin on the little prairie between the bluffs and the wild river, and if there were wolves and roving Indians and an occasional stray trapper, they were her only companions in the long winters. In the spring and summer her husband could be back on his little farm, but only then.

Cardinel drops out of the story very soon. What happened to him in the wilderness is not certain. But the girl—her life was barely begun. For the widow of Cardinel is said to have married twelve husbands in succession, in the century or so following his death. Who they all were or what befell each or any of her baker's dozen of frontiersmen is unknown.

In the very year of her death a strange thing occurred to another member of her sex, a worthy successor in a way to this hardy French pioneer woman. Until comparatively recently there lived in Prairie du Chien a very curious old lady. What made her so interesting was that she perpetually wore a tiny cap on her head, and if requested to do so she would lift it up for people to see under. What they saw was a round bald

spot. She was Madame Marie Louise Gagnier Chenier, the scalped baby.

She could not be expected to remember in too great detail what occurred when she was ten months old, but her mother did, and so Madame Chenier wrote down what had happened to her, as it was explained to her afterward.

The Gagnier family, living in Frenchtown, a quarter of Prairie du Chien, was seated about the table having an after-dinner chat. There were the mother and father, the three-year-old son Frank, the infant Marie Louise, and the visitors Paschal Menoir and one Lipcap.

Four Indians who had reached the door, innocently entered the room [Marie wrote]. Mother placing four chairs bade them be seated. They complied. Mother asked them to have dinner. They replied, "We are not hungry but thirsty." She satisfied their wants and watching them closely she said to father in French, "These Indians mean to do us harm." Father made no reply. His gun was hanging in fastenings to a joist directly over him. Three of the Indians had guns, the fourth a chief whose name signified Little Sun, was seated nearest to my father.

Another of them, and probably the ringleader, was the tragic Red Bird. He had long been known as a "good Indian," but recently word had come to him of the murder of certain members of his tribe farther up the river.

A shot was suddenly fired and the father slipped to the floor.

The house filled with powder and smoke and my little brother was crying. Mother picked him up and ran out of the

house. The Indians had preceded her and leaped over the fence near the house. Mother made her way over the fence and dropped directly in front of one of the Indians, who was crouching by her on that side. Dropping the child, she seized his gun and with unnatural strength wrenched it away from him, and returned to the house.

I had creeped under the bed. Father was not dead but could not speak or move but made motions with his eyes which she clearly understood as saying, "Make your escape." She then ran out and through a picket fence which divided their grounds from those of a man named Joseph Lariviere. She hurriedly told him what had occurred and asked him to help her. He mounted his horse and rode cowardly away, without a word.

She then returned to the house. Father, who still lived, again with expressive looks plainly signalled, "Get away." Mother then with my little brother made her way into the timber close to the house. In her flight she noticed a large soft maple tree which had been blown down and that the place where it had stood was surrounded by a dense growth of brush. She crept into this and into the cavity made by uprooting the tree placed Frank and crouching over him remained almost breathless until, within twelve feet of her hiding place the Indians killed Lipcap with their knives, mutilitating him and taking his scalp. My mother was not discovered.

The infant daughter apparently was not considered important enough, in the mind of that frontier mother, to be rescued. While Paschal Menoir, the surviving visitor, ran to alarm the village the Indians went back to the house.

I had creeped from under the bed to the door when the Indians returned. Little Sun testified at the trial of himself and Red Bird, "I first gave the child a kick on the left hip and then with the gun barrel in my hands struck her with the breech of the gun on the right shoulder and with my knife struck her in the back of the neck, intending to behead her and carry the head away with me."

Other Indians, though, warned him that people were coming.

"I then took her scalp and with it part of the skull."
He then scalped father, down whose dying face the tears were flowing at witnessing the horrid butchery of myself. When the rescue party reached the house my father was dead. I was lying in a pool of my own blood and supposed to be dead. Julian Lariviere wrapped me in his handkerchief. Some hours later, when being washed preparatory to burial I was first discovered to be alive and by careful nursing and tender care, under Kind Providance, was restored to health.

She was restored not only to health but in due time to the full vigor of pioneer womanhood. Marie Louise lived to marry twice, having ten children by her first husband and three by her second, and she died of old age.

It was the Gagnier massacre which precipitated the Winnebago war, in which Red Bird finally surrendered, to be imprisoned in the fort at Prairie du Chien.

Gradually the restless prairie was settling down into a thriving community. The great John Jacob Astor fur company had an office there under the Frenchman Joseph Rolette. He and Michael Brisbois had come down from Canada as voyageurs for the Michilimackinac company; now Brisbois was an independent trader and had built the fine stone house on the Indian mound, which we had seen. In what is to-day the "Riverside Repair Shop" Rolette did his business for the Astor company, with Louis Herkules Dousman for his clerk. Dousman was the son of a Pennsylvania Dutchman who had migrated to the St. Lawrence country and sent his son out to learn the fur business after giving him

Sometimes a village clustered in a coulée

a gentleman's education in the eastern United States. Herkules learned the business well: he obtained a vast tract of land from the Indians and founded a fortune. It was his estate that we had seen, through the dusk, at the end of the road.

The rise of Dousman marked the beginning of the new ways—the gaiety, the civilization, and the splash. Rolette was an old-timer still, used to the old wild ways. He was explaining to a stranger one day how complicated his business really was. "Let me tell you," he protested, "it's not so easy to cheat the Indians as you think."

After his fashion he was successful, but his methods were not distinguished by finesse. When Augustin Grignon, a rival fur-trader living near Lake Pepin, became too dangerous a competitor, his house was mysteriously burned down, and Rolette's business ran more to his liking after that.

There is no reason to believe that Rolette particularly cherished his own hearth-side. On a journey up the river, one spring, he met a neighbor who had just left the town. "How are my pigs?" shouted Rolette to the passing skiff. "And my cows?" The report was favorable *"Allez!"* he called, and the man went on. But suddenly the trader had an afterthought. *"Arrêtez!"* he called again, "How is Madame Rolette . . . and the children?"

Under Dousman, though, times changed. He was the moving spirit of the first spurt of gaiety, humor, and expensiveness known on the rigorous Northern frontier. In the Prairie du Chien of his making, between a trackless Indian-haunted forest and a great

green river pushing its flood through lands unknown, there was for a time a brilliant little society with a New Yorkish, a positively Continental flavor. The great men of that day, the bold men, often went out of their path across the country to spend a week or two with the Dousman family; a week of music, wine, elaborate food and good conversation, on the estate at the end of the road.

There was one especially bright flare before the end. Steamboats had long been plying up and down the river; the Prairie du Chien wharf was always a meeting-place for people from St. Paul, St. Louis, and farther down the river. Now the railroads had pushed their way as far as this, but they ran no farther. All who went on over the prairies west of the river went by wagon or by water. So this little city was the farthest outpost of civilization for a time. A great hotel was built for the travelers; they called it the Dousman House in honor of the leading citizen. Empty, it overlooks the river now. It had to be a gay place, for perhaps this would be the last good band the guests would hear, the last ball they would attend, in many years. It had to be something for the outbound pioneers to remember in the generation of hard work that lay ahead of them.

Some of the more distinguished of these were of course put up at Villa Louis, the home of the Dousman family. Really, they had had three successive dwellings on this estate. First a one-room rock shack, open at one end, the earliest home Herkules had built. Then with prosperity came a more comfortable home of two stories, with wide porches and balconies, and a number

of accessory buildings. There were stables, a smoke-house and slaughter-house, a machine-shop, and a laundry. One of the first square pianos to cross the Alleghanies was brought here. Gardens were laid out and artesian fountains fell into a series of descending pools. An avenue of maples was planted to shade a brick walk running down to the road. Behind the house, green lawns sloped off to the river and the private wharf.

The next generation, in the full flower of prosperity, needed more. So the great brick mansion now dominating the whole was erected. Their father's house was used as a school for the children, the original rock shack became an accessory to the barns. Here they lived in baronial style, entertaining lavishly and often. They owned a small steamboat to take them to another home in St. Paul, to still another in St. Louis. A private race-track was laid out, across the road. A sculptor came from Italy and stayed with them for more than a year while he carved from a block of marble a statue of two of the children.

We walked over to see. But it was a strangely depressing experience, for no one stayed on the old estate now except a watchman; no one was doing anything about it. It had simply been left behind.

The watchman offered to show us what remained. He unlocked the heavy door upon a reception hall carpeted with red plush and furnished in heavy walnut. Furnished! But it was years since any one had lived there. There it stood, abandoned in midair, between breakfast and luncheon, as it were, waiting. Waiting year after year to go on where it had left off. They had simply left it intact! Some legal difficulty had been

standing in the way of its sale, the watchman explained. There was something about proving title to land obtained long ago in a deal with the Indians.

We wandered about the great high-ceilinged rooms, feeling that we scarcely belonged here. They were waiting for somebody else, somebody they had once known well. Pieces of furniture had been removed from time to time, but much remained. In the library there were documentary histories of the Civil War, of earlier wars. The nursery was bare, but something lay on the floor. It was a worn folio-sized volume, its binding cracked. We turned the leaves: it was an early Hogarth.

Upstairs were more ghostly rooms, furnished and waiting. The watchman pointed to a scorched bureau. He said that here many years ago one of the Dousman belles had stood curling her hair for a party, when her lamp exploded, swallowing her in flame.

Our guide wanted to take us to the attic. Under the eaves stood a group of small cowhide trunks. He pulled them out and opened them. And he lifted for us to see, in the huge dim attic, faded crinolines, laces, ruffles, bustles, crumbling taffetas.

In silence we strolled slowly down through the waiting house again and over the broad shabby grounds, back along the river-front, and down to the shanty-boat.

That night we heard music on the water-front, and—it seemed very strange—there were lights in the long windows of one half the ground floor of the old hotel! Well, we had been living in the past all day; perhaps we were beginning to dream of it at night.

There were lights and music and the raucous squawk

of toy horns. Wondering what could have caused this sudden startling revival, we entered, and found ourselves in a vast domed lobby now beribboned with strips of many-colored crêpe paper. Over the desk where railroad presidents and steamboat masters once wrote their names, a boy mechanically handed us two paper hats, a striped horn, and a whistle.

He explained. A young people's club of the town had rented the dining-saloon of the hotel for its annual carnival, for they thought it was a shame that the old place never was used any more. There was so much space and the floors were so slick. We assented in a sort of trance and moved on. The word "BAR" was engraved in the glass transom of a great walnut door. But this was closed; the party was in another direction.

Bright balloons were jerking, bobbing, and sometimes bursting over a mass of young people who surged in the dining-hall. There was much more crêpe paper here; there was a perspiring band on a platform, and a din of toy horns above its syncopation. Over the massed heads electric bulbs hung stark from wires that ended high up in plaster medallions from which crystal chandeliers once swung; and up above, there, the domed hall seemed to be holding itself aloof from the new young crowd that had taken possession.

In the morning it was quiet again, it was all over. Young Prairie du Chien had taken itself and all its paraphernalia of celebration over the marsh to the new town, leaving the river-front to its recollections.

Chapter VII

A FIND

THE engine that had been pushing the shanty-boat was transferred now to the fourteen-foot speed-hull which we had been towing, and we shoved off on a voyage of more intimate exploration. We wanted to see more of the bluffs forming the Prairie du Chien basin, and the Wisconsin River mouth where Marquette and Joliet had first seen the Mississippi.

So accustomed were we to our plodding pace that the first taste of the *Salamander* was a really heady experience, and for almost an hour we raced our own spray at a dizzying twenty-five-mile clip, up and down the water-front, between the braces of a pontoon railroad bridge, and in and out among the islands. Then we headed for Point Lookout.

The first glimpse of the promontory came from the sandy edge of a green towhead. The *Salamander* swerved right and we found ourselves shooting over the whirlpools and eddies formed where the tawny waters of the Wisconsin mingled with the green Mississippi. We slowed down to pick our way between the sand-bars, and then beached the boat under the brow of the bluff. From that dim narrow waterway Joliet and Father Marquette, with their small band of Fox Indians, came to this place and looked at the mile-wide

river beyond them, the first white men to see its upper reaches. In shallow canoes they had endured the terrors of the St. Lawrence and Lake Huron, then the Straits of Mackinac and Lake Michigan, and afterward a racking journey over the tricky Fox and Wisconsin rivers till they came at last to the great river of Indian legend.

"Here we are, then," said Marquette, "on this so renowned river . . . the Mississippi."

To see more, they climbed up the bluff now named Point Lookout in honor of this great occasion. On the small green prairie below them a group of Indians were playing a game. The Frenchmen watched, and then their eyes followed the river up and down as far as they could see. They knew now that for some reason they had been chosen to do a tremendous work for their king as well as their God. This was a great day.

Standing there now, we had a fine view of the river, the fullest we had yet seen. Up the gorge lay a silver lacework of water, twisting in and out to make islands, sloughs, and towheads. Below, where the two rivers mixed, a broader current piled on down under the cliffs. We had not known the river looked like this.

"I saw it with a joy that I cannot express," Marquette wrote in his journal that June evening, more than two hundred and fifty years ago.

He called it the river of Immaculate Conception, fulfilling thus a vow he had made before leaving France. Then Joliet claimed all the land drained by the river and all of its tributaries, for the King of France, and all the people living in these unpenetrated wilds as his subjects.

Later they went as far as the mouth of the Arkansas River, a matter of more than one thousand miles. Marquette was convinced by then that the Mississippi would empty into the Gulf of Mexico as it was believed to do, and he went no farther, for he feared meeting with Spaniards below, and the French were just then at war with Spain. So the fertile valley of the great river was made known to France. But over there they had other worries. The claim was reaffirmed on the shores of Lake Pepin a little later, but save for an occasional coureur de bois, the Indians in the bottoms remained in peace for another hundred years.

Across from us now, on the Iowa side, little MacGregor village climbed up a coulée under the shadow of a massive bluff that must be Pike's peak, the original, the first edition. This fine craggy cliff, dominating the whole stretch of river and bottom-land from bend to bend—better, indeed, than does Marquette's promontory—and even the plains lying inland behind the river gorge, is a sort of family joke among those who live in the valley. They seem, indeed, to be about the only ones who know it exists, for Zebulon Pike lived to give his name to a greater peak than this, and no doubt he would rejoice if he could know that the latter is the only one very widely associated with his name.

The American Revolution was well over, but it was still doubtful whether or not all the land of the great Northwest was to be considered a part of the conquest of the colonies. Congress decided it was, but was well aware that the majority of the inhabitants of the region had other ideas. In the year 1805 young Lieu-

tenant Pike was sent up the river with a flat-boat to take down British flags wherever he saw them flying. He was also to converse with the traders and find out, if possible, whether they were influencing the Indians toward allegiance to France or Britain.

It is said that he did not find out much, for every one was very polite to the young lieutenant but also very evasive. They courteously took down their flags when he requested them to do so; but once his boat was around the next bend, they ran them up again.

Another of his commissions from Washington was to select the site for a military fort to be used as a base in Indian warfare, and he chose as "most eligible" the peak which bears his name. For from its brow you could see anything that was happening for many miles in any direction. An excellent observatory, he thought.

Yes, and an excellent place upon which to be observed! More experienced Indian-fighters than Pike pointed out that the guerilla fighters could, and most certainly would, steal up the wooded hillside and ambuscade the soldiers as they sat tranquilly peering over the far plains from their observatory on the summit. No, there was a touch of Braddock in Pike, and his peak would never do for Indian-fighting. So when the time came, the fort was built on the plain at Prairie du Chien, across the river. Eventually Pike went far west and found the better peak to give his name to.

In itself, Pike's Peak of Iowa was nothing to be ashamed of, as we saw it. A fine bluff, commanding a superb view; and most entertaining to climb, for it was cut by gorges where streams fell in picturesque cascades over vividly colored rocks.

Chapter VIII

SOME SUGAR-PLUMS

PATCHES of sunlight were shifting along the walls and across the floor of the cabin as our direction changed, up along one side of a head of land, down the other. All of the windows and doors were open wide and soft October breezes drifted through. The river shimmered between blue and gold under a tranquil sky, except at the very edge, close by the bluff. The deep eddies here were dim as shadowed caverns. So the pilot was dreaming at the wheel.

Curled up on the forward deck was the mate, a map unrolled before her, looking to see what lay ahead. Her finger stopped at the word "Guttenberg," a village just about five miles down the river. A town named for the inventor of movable type? We knew of no other reason for turning in there—it was early afternoon—but a name like that couldn't be passed up. On second thought the skipper suggested that Gutenberg of the fifteenth century had spelled his name a little differently, but not enough, he added, to worry about. We must investigate this place.

Presently the tangled bluff-side gave place to the broad green slope of lawn of which somebody had obviously been taking extremely good care. A row of little gabled roofs, topped by a regiment of brick chim-

neys, just visible along the ridge, persuaded us that this was Guttenberg.

As we turned in, our eyes were caught by something very, very strange, a circumstance that turned the calendar back a good forty years then and there. What we saw was a series of spotless white rings chained to as many stone blocks at the foot of the grass slope.

Now, the old steamboat men that are left will tell you that there was a time when the levee-front of every river town, large or small, was fringed with such a row of iron hoops. They were diligently whitewashed so that they would be quickly visible, even with the searchlight of a packet landing at night. A few weeks ago we had discovered, under heaps of rubbish on the Alma water-front, an old rusted ring, stubborn survivor of its past usefulness, and it had given us the thrill that comes only to archæologists. But here was a place where people did not even realize—or acknowledge—that the usefulness of their rings was in the past! It may have been decades since any steamboat put in here and wound its hawsers through the iron hoops; and it may be as long before another breaks in upon its peace. No matter, Guttenberg will be ready when it comes, for some one is kept whitewashing those rings all the time. Oh yes, we had been right to stop and look in here. . . .

We started along the white gravel path that led uphill to the town. The skipper's eyes were on the ground. No, it wasn't gravel, it was clam-shells with round holes cut in them. Waste clam-shells, left over after the "pearl" buttons had been cut out, had been thriftily put to use.

Then we were up the hill and—it looked as if we had strayed into a picture-book. Nowhere else could there be such a spotless town. Facing the river was a solid row of little houses, one story, or a story and a half, of limestone, brick, or clapboards, with wide eaves and steep roofs, and here and there along the line an old-fashioned bow-window. The more we looked, the more persuasive was the illusion: the village had been lifted unblemished from the pages of Hans Andersen.

It was the skipper who first observed the amazing waterspouts. Each tiny building had a narrow galvanized iron gutter running along the front eave, to catch rain. But instead of turning them down to drain in the ground, the ingenious architects of Guttenberg had hit upon a rare solution. They extended them straight over the sidewalk in mid-air till they sloped at a gentle angle at last to vent the rain in the road. As you progressed down Front Street you were making your way under a continuous series of waterspouts.

You passed a number of shops, their small-paned windows crowded with laden shelves. It must have been dark behind those windows. The houses were just about the same; you could usually tell a dwelling from a store by the presence of potted geraniums, instead of winter flannels, behind the glass.

There was one window nobody could have resisted. On the very top shelf were jars of jelly beans, jujubes, and red-white-and-blue candy canes; on the next below, "nigger babies," Teddy-bears, and gum-drops; then hoarhound, lemon drops, licorice, and rock candy. Comfits, sugar-plums—that's what they were. They

had given our grandmothers their first illicit stomach-aches.

We opened the door. And, naturally, a bell began to tinkle. By this time we had quite absorbed the atmosphere of make-believe, and if no bell had tinkled we should have felt let down. And if behind the counter no old lady had beamed at us from the depths of a tremendous flowered sunbonnet, we should have felt inclined to report the oversight to Andersen, Grimm & Company. But there she was.

For the moment or two that it took our eyes to accustom themselves to the dimness of this little room we were silent. Gradually we perceived a wall of oilcloth-covered shelves, with glass jars of herbs and confections, and a counter of oak, whitened and smooth from long use and, we thought, from a good many brisk scrubbings. And there was a case of sweets—red, yellow, pink, and black.

The old lady herself was crisp with the starch of her apron, her sunbonnet, and her black-and-white calico dress. But her wrinkled face was kind. She waited.

It occurred to us that we had come to buy.

"Have you a quarter-pound of hoarhound?" asked the mate.

"Wie, bitte?" the old lady inquired politely.

And there we had it. We were in Germany for the moment, of course! So we pointed to a tray of bright sweets, laid money on the counter, and trotted off with a fat brown sack, twenty years younger, each of us.

This was a fragment of the Germany of the 1840's, we learned a little later, from a resident who happily was bilingual. We found him lounging in a rocking-

chair before a blacksmith shop which boasted a single gasoline pump at the curb—the town's one concession, apparently, to the twentieth century. He had nothing in particular to do, and he was glad, over the contents of our brown-paper sack, to explain Guttenberg, but if the name had a direct connection with that of the man who revolutionized the publishing business, five hundred years ago, he hadn't heard of it.

Germans of the 'forty-eight migration had come here. A part of that great exodus which had sought the republic across the ocean when their own revolution collapsed, they had trekked over the Alleghany watershed, down the Ohio, and up the Mississippi, until they found this fair Iowa plateau overlooking the water. Here on this prairie they had staked out their farms, and on the verge of the bluff they had planned their village. Old customs of thrift and cleanliness, new ideals of democracy abode together.

"I guess it's just about the same here now," our friend observed, "as it was in the beginning. Just about the same."

It was a pity to have to say good-by to Guttenberg.

Chapter IX

THE PHANTOM METROPOLIS

THERE was, above Cassville, the usual steep bluff, with an occasional outcropping of limestone, an occasional grassy slope where a herd of cows was grazing. Down below, on a brief flat strip by the water's edge, was the nest of roofs, among them the two long chimneys of the canneries, the industries that supported the community. For beyond the precipitous bank lay a plateau of rich soil for truck-gardening. But the villagers must always have before their eyes the bluff as a rustic back drop to remind them, as they shopped on Main Street, that the pasture lot was within hailing distance.

Perhaps it was too much to expect that they, living below the bluff, squeezed between its walls and the river, should ever effectually defy it. For just so Cassville had been eighty years before, and so it was now, notwithstanding all the pride and all the ambition of its grand old man, Nelson Dewey. And so, most likely, it must always be, despite the hopes of the man who was mayor when we visited the town.

It was the mayor who met us as we landed. He hadn't exactly intended an official reception. He had been attracted, he confessed, by the outlandish spectacle of an outboard motor propelling a shanty-boat

on the Mississippi. Wherever the mayor does his work in Cassville, it was near enough so that he could reach the waterside in time to watch us make a landing. He came aboard and examined the boat; we showed him what there was.

Then it was his turn. Did we want to see the town? Didn't we know about Cassville? Well!

He proceeded to guide us about the phantom metropolis. For that really is what this strip of neat streets, far down in the southernmost corner of Wisconsin, turned out to be.

We walked up from the wharf, and then turned to the right. A little farther along we stopped. The mayor seemed about to make a speech. Bewildered, we gazed about us at a number of white frame residences, a church, and a feed store.

"Now this is the capital square," the mayor announced.

We persuaded him to explain himself.

Nelson Dewey, Wisconsin's first governor, had lived most of his life in Cassville. The rambling old Dewey house was still standing at the other end of the town. ("My father used to be the head gardener on their place," the mayor interjected. "I'll never forget the stories he told about the family.") This place was chosen by his people, dissatisfied Yankees who had plodded across the wilderness, as a likely one to thrive, a promising place to stake one's fortune on. It might be—things happened so fast—a prosperous city within their time. Young Nelson seemed to share their dream.

As the territory was emerging into statehood, he decided that the time had come. His village must be

From Pike's Peak—the first edition—we could look over the swampy islands

chosen capital of the new State. They got their heads together, he and other leaders of that region, and a movement was speedily under way. There were so many arguments; those, for example, which had determined the elder Deweys to choose it for their home. It all seemed very simple.

"See that hillside up yonder, cattle grazing on it?" said the mayor, waving his arm. "Well, Dewey had that all platted for lots, back in the 'forties. He had everything laid out, Capital Square and the rest. Had names for his streets, up there on the bluff. Thought they'd make a big city out of it, capital and all, you know. So they platted all the way up the bluff."

Then we remembered the town of Helena. Somewhere along the wayward Wisconsin River, set well back from the marshy water's edge, a comfortable farm-house dreams over gayer days. One old lady lives there. Well, it's a pleasant place to live, with the tawny stream meandering by, and the soft green hills rolling away on the other side. But it's not what it used to be.

This old house, with its solitary lady, is all that remains of Helena, Wisconsin. The town was advantageously situated at the base of an abrupt bluff that had been drilled to be used as a shot-tower. A spring-fed pool at the foot of the shaft cooled the lead into bullets. And there was another industry, for in those days there was timber to cut and raft down the Wisconsin to the Mississippi. Rough-and-ready strangers came and went; there was laughter and cursing in the saloon. Now and then a "boss" with a diamond stick-pin turned up. There was a noisy wharf where cat-tails now run wild.

It was not illogical for Helena to bid in for the capital. When it came time to vote, Cassville and Helena each got just one vote less than a wild-oak grove more centrally located: the future Madison. Since then people have stopped dripping molten lead down dark shafts to make bullets. The timber lands have become dairy-farms. And the Wisconsin River, dammed for electric power, has lost its usefulness to navigation. Helena has vanished. The old lady lives alone where once there was a town, to tell the occasional passing stranger what happened.

Cassville was so much more fortunate. And its mayor still had an unshaken belief in its future expansion! He pointed out to us that the location of the town was especially good, for the river was narrow here, and no islands intervened between it and the opposite bank. This made it, he told us, an admirable site for a future Mississippi River bridge.

"In a couple of years we'll have a bridge," he promised. "And . . . we'll plat that hillside yet!"

Alone, we walked slowly back down the pleasant little street. It was easy to see why its residents should like it, should become very deeply attached to it. Less easy, though, to understand how they should have wanted to alter it by importing troops of state senators and representatives, governors, lieutenant governors, lobbyists, and press associations. . . . But Dewey was a great and good pioneer; and pioneers, we reflected, must work and plan, and never, never be satisfied.

We strolled down to the wharf through the haze of the old governor's dream.

Chapter X

LITTLE NIGHT AND BROWN'S BANDITTI

THE mate, who was still a little green at the science of navigation and never could be quite sure which way the wind was coming from, was placidly guiding toward the high middle draw of a wagon bridge, and it had not occurred to her to look around and find out what was happening to the position of the boat. So long as she had her fixed steering-point and was holding the Ark to it, everything seemed all right.

In sudden alarm, then, she roused the skipper from his nap; the wind had been pushing broadside at the boat until it was well down toward one of the concrete piers of the bridge.

It seemed to the mate that the skipper, when he seized the wheel, was aiming the Ark right back up the river again toward Wisconsin. Had it been au revoir, then, to that fair commonwealth, and not good-by?

We bucked the wind for a full quarter-hour, heading almost straight up-stream all the while, and gradually, by this perverse process, we were actually nearing the Dubuque shore, where we wanted to be. The skipper edged into a little cove beside some fishing-boats and under the shadow of a crumbling brick tower, well out of the wind. This would do for Dubuque; we'd pass up the harbor.

After supper that evening, we entertained, rather unexpectedly. Our phonograph had been busy much of the day, and now we pulled out an old German folk-song, recorded in Europe. After it was finished we thought we heard a stir on the front porch, and then there was a rap on the door.

"Beg pardon . . ."

Bright blue eyes looked from under eyebrows that went this way and that way, above wrinkled pink cheeks. The old man was holding his pipe in one hand and his cap in the other. He wondered, were we from the Old Country? No? Well, he was, a long while back, and happening to be down in the cove to look after his john-boat, he heard that song we were playing, and he thought perhaps . . .

Then the three of us sat by the stove and played all the records in the shanty-boat collection.

We were strangers in Dubuque, but what hospitality there was we had given him, and old Louie seemed to feel he should do something about it. So he told us about Little Night, or Little Cloud. Those were the names the Fox Indians had for Julien Dubuque, the white wonder-worker who had come to their land to exploit the Mines of Spain, away back, one hundred and fifty years ago and more.

It was the first time a white man had ever proposed taking any land for his own on the west bank of the Mississippi, so far north; the first time any of them ever had suggested settling in what is now Iowa. So the small, swarthy French Canadian, sent down into the wilderness to seek his fortune, had to use some supernatural tactics to gain his ends. First he used simpler

strategy. Having heard that the Fox possessed extensive lead-mines, and having cautiously investigated them for himself, he proceeded to pay a series of state visits from Prairie du Chien, where he was then established, to Chief Peosta, always bringing presents. But the brightest beads and the richest pelts and skins he invariably gave to comely young Potosa, the daughter of the chief, who seems to have been impressed by his favors.

Young Julien was married to Potosa, and taken into the tribe as Little Night (because, for a white man's skin, his was very dark) with due ceremony. He was also given, by all the chiefs in conclave at Prairie du Chien, a formal grant to a tract of land extending for twenty-one miles along the west bank of the Mississippi and nine miles inland.

He proceeded to supplant the Indians' cumbersome methods of mining with more speedy ones of his own, and to live happily with Potosa and his doting father-in-law. Occasionally, to still the suspicions and resentment of the less fortunate braves, he resorted to magic and thus maintained a comfortable ascendancy. He made money and took an annual journey down the river to cosmopolitan St. Louis. Governor Carondelet of Spanish Louisiana gave him legal title to his mines, which, in recognition of the favor, he promptly called the Mines of Spain. Dubuque was ever adaptable in the pursuit of a goal.

Once the Indians decided he had been encroaching too far on native rights and refused him a further claim. He called them to his cabin, having first taken the precaution to hide a bottle of turpentine handily

by the edge of Catfish Creek, which flowed by the house.

When the braves gathered about he made his demand, and was refused. The Great Spirit would punish such obstinacy, he warned. Still they were firm. Thereupon he snatched up a torch and flung it into the creek, which promptly sprang into a moving sheet of flame.

Sternly he motioned the shrieking Indians to be still. He said:

"Now, if you do not yield, I will burn up your creek, your canoes, your wigwams, yourselves. I will set fire to the Mississippi and burn it up. But I loved you before you hated me, and I will forgive you if the Great Manitou will let me. I give you the time only of one breath to answer me. If not, the river will burn."

So Dubuque lived in great honor among his adopted people, and in great prosperity. When he died, still a comparatively young man, he was buried beside his illustrious father-in-law, Chief Peosta. He left no heirs, and the right of accession to his property was sold to the St. Louis Chouteaus.

It was almost a quarter-century later that white immigrants came in numbers to make the first real settlement at Dubuque; but, for all that, it speedily became one of the most prosperous ports on the upper Mississippi. There were still the lead-mines, and when they dwindled, the town became a milling center for the great timber rafts floated down the river from the Wisconsin and Minnesota pineries.

The chief concern of its residents seemed to us, when we strolled out next morning, to be the problem of

getting from the lower town to the upper town and back. For half of Dubuque was built on a terrace by the river bank and half on the top of the sheer bluff behind. There was a drop of one hundred yards or so between them, and so it was a real problem.

It was partly solved by a fascinating little cable-car, riding on which could become a habit-forming indulgence, as we discovered. The incline was so steep that the seats were arranged one above the other, like steps. Entering at the bottom, you pulled a cord, the door shut mysteriously, and up you went. It was then that you discovered that there were only three rails and that another car just like yours was headed straight down upon you, empty, from the top, and using one of the rails occupied by your car.

As you were about to leap for your life, both cars switched, glided by harmlessly on a brief stretch of double track, and switched back. Meanwhile the city was sinking below you.

We played with the little elevator trolley for some time and never did quite decide whether it was more exciting to ride up or to come down and watch the city rush up to slap us in the face.

We had fun in Dubuque. We found, too, that the federal barge line was doing a land-office business in the port, a very modern, active harbor. The attempt of the Government to revive the steamboat in modern form to move freight for the Mississippi Valley farmers and manufacturers was receiving coöperation here in this enterprising community. Five steamboats were then pushing barges between St. Paul and Dubuque, and between Dubuque and St. Louis.

When the Ark shoved off from the town the motor was not behaving properly. The skipper went aft and found the muffler was spitting out pieces of itself as a baby spits out soda crackers. Unfortunately, the largest hole was directly under the gasoline feed-line; the heat from the exhaust vaporized the gasoline before it could get to the carburetor, and things were all wrong.

He called for the can-opener. It took more than that; it needed the hammer, too; but eventually the entire muffler was twisted off and we made another start.

When the engine was opened up we announced the fact to the entire valley. Some could have been forgiven, to be sure, for mistaking us for a machine-gun attack. She ripped, she roared, she exploded . . . she made noise. So we cluttered at last up to the levee of the town of Bellevue.

It was the man from whom we bought gasoline here who started us on the Timber Wolves, a notorious gang of bandits who terrorized the Mississippi Valley in the 'thirties. He introduced us to an old gentleman who was supposed to have the story cold. He proved it, more or less, by exhibiting a bullet which he said his father had received in the arm at the famous battle of Brown's Hotel, right here in Bellevue.

The Yankee settlers who followed the golden fleece of Little Night to these parts of the upper valley seem to have had their troubles in plenty. Of course in the days before the steamboat, when goods and passengers were moved on slow, cumbersome flatboats, banditry was a very profitable business; and gangs were waiting on many an island in a deserted bend, to overwhelm

a barge and seize the cargo. But in addition to these specialists, there were gangs whose looting and fraud ranged over a more general course; and many of them, too, hid out along the river. So the bandits were making life burdensome and property uncertain to the frontiersmen in the upper valley, until at last they were driven back in the famous battle at the hotel.

Brown was a stranger, flush with money, who arrived in the community and built a large hostelry. He was exceedingly popular for a time, and, though so recent an arrival, was beginning to be looked upon as one of the town's leading citizens. Unfortunately, however, a profusion of counterfeit money followed closely upon his coming, and the more suspicious of the townsfolk began a quiet investigation. They noted, in addition to the matter of the counterfeit money, that horses stolen from all the neighboring territory were being pretty regularly found hidden away in the Big Woods of Jackson County, close by. And these were days when a man valued his horse.

Gradually the thing was uncovered—all in secret, of course. They were waiting for a good opportunity to make their attack, for this was a serious matter. They found that the gang who called themselves the Timber Wolves had hundreds of men operating in northern Illinois, in Wisconsin, in Iowa, and down the river to Missouri. Some of their confederates ranged as far as Kentucky. They made counterfeit in caves along the river, and they stole.

As nearly as any one could discover, they were a well-knit organization with a code all their own, and a hierarchy of leaders many of whom were not wild vaga-

bonds at all but had the manners of gentlemen—like Brown. They had a well-tried system of marketing and they were fattening almost undisturbed on fraud.

The gang was traced down to headquarters in quiet little Bellevue's leading hotel. The small group who had taken upon themselves the burden of investigating debonair, hail-fellow Citizen Brown knew now that the matter of getting rid of him and his crowd also depended on them. These were days when policing was pretty generally a popular concern. The question was brewing quietly, when matters unexpectedly came to a head, and occasion was offered for a more spectacular rout than any one had dreamed of.

A ball was given one snowy January evening in 1840, to celebrate the victory of Jackson at New Orleans, twenty-five years before. The swift gay song of the fiddles and the throwing of confetti were abruptly ended by the shrieks of a woman outside. One member of the hotel crowd had grown unbelievably bold. Prowling upstairs in the bedrooms of one of the darkened houses while the ball was in progress, he found a woman alone, robbed her, and attempted attack. Now in the delirium of panic she faced the guests and demanded revenge.

All gentlemen went armed for any occasion, in those days. Mr. J. C. Mitchell reached for his gun and rushed into the street in pursuit of the invader. The heavy snowfall confused the two men, but at last they met. The bandit fired and missed; Mitchell, a cooler and more careful man, fired an instant later and the assailant fell.

His confederates were promptly plotting revenge.

The story is that they stole a keg of powder from the village store and laid it in the cellar of the Mitchell house. A broken fuse was all that saved the family from violent death the same night. The news of this latest deviltry roused the fury of the townspeople to such a pitch that they gathered now for a fight that should break up forever the power of Brown and his banditti.

The bandits were rounded up and driven into the hotel, where they barricaded themselves successfully for that night. In the morning the sheriff arrived with a posse of forty men, who surrounded the hotel and demanded surrender. Brown appeared at the door and for an answer coolly raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired point-blank into the posse. Then fusillade met fusillade for nearly an hour. Brown fell and his bandits were driven from room to room. Gun-butts, bowie-knives, and pistols came into play, but the posse could effect no real victory.

At last the building was set afire and thirteen of the Wolves were captured; the rest bolted for the timber and made their escape. In the presence of the prisoners, a vote was taken among the townsfolk to determine their deserts, a black bean for hanging and a white one for whipping and driving them out of town on a rail. The white beans prevailed by a majority of three, and the whippings administered them served to warn the gang and all its confederates away from Bellevue for good.

Their depredations were continued in other regions, from a new base. Members of this gang were held responsible for the murder of Colonel Davenport, three

years later, at his home in Rock Island. Their final eradication was brought about, some years after, through the activities of a citizens' Vigilance Committee organized for the purpose. These men took upon themselves "to be governed by the penal laws of the state in so far as it is convenient," and with a policy so well adapted to the men they sought they succeeded at last in wiping Brown's banditti out of the valley, no one knows just how.

The old gentleman who told us pointed to a shelf over the front door.

"That's where we kept the gun," he said. "My dad used to oil it up regularly every Sunday evening as long as there was a Wolf on the river. Wouldn't sleep right, otherwise."

Now we were breezing down alongside a fat green island below the town, our heads full of the yarn, and the mate was seeing a sawed-off shot-gun in every bush.

We wondered, as we whooped up our little wood stove, where the South might be said to begin. Halfway down Iowa, we were, with Missouri not far off; and to our ears Missouri had a Southern sound. It was cozy in the little cabin, but out the windows the Mississippi was a bleak expanse under a heavy sky. Back a little way, somebody had warned us: "River's going to jell up pretty soon now."

Almost any hour of the day great loops and wedges of wild ducks and geese were winging above us, down over the river toward the bayous of Louisiana, where

we meant to be eventually, if the Ark stood by us. At night we heard them calling in flight.

A steamboat passed us now and then, pushing a great steel barge loaded with grain, so the navigation season up here was still open, apparently; but a couple of days ago a government crew had come around and picked up the buoys used to mark the back channels of the river. They left the main channel buoys, but in a few weeks these too would be picked up, the steamboats would dock at some mild Southern port for the winter, and the upper river would be left to its snow and ice.

The river and the surrounding country-side were changing as we went on. There were no more rocky cliffs overhanging us, but mild hillsides dotted with farms rolled gently from the river on the Iowa side. We passed a red school-house, quite alone in a shallow valley, with sheds behind to shelter the horses belonging to pupils who had to come a long way.

There was no way of knowing what lay on the Illinois side, for all we could see were green trees ankle-deep in water. The river was at a rather high stage and had flooded the marshes. Perhaps these were only islands that we took for the shore and there were further stretches of water behind; and far back, the Illinois mainland.

Smoke was rising from the west shore as we sauntered around a bend, and presently we were buzzing up along the wharves of the city of Clinton. Here we were confronted by a massive railroad drawbridge. To our astonishment, it began to open as the little Ark

approached. We were convinced there must be a steamboat coming up the river from the other side. The skipper carefully steered far over to one side of the opening, to give it plenty of berth.

But there was no steamboat. The tremendous structure had heaved itself up for us alone. Closed, it could have been cleared comfortably, by several Arks at a time. But then, of course, we were still without a muffler, and to the bridge-tender we probably had sounded like a vessel of importance.

Toward late afternoon the sky began to clear and the sun came out. Everything was different then; frost did not seem so close. The river was a beaming sheet of water mottled gold and blue. The Ark plowed happily along until the red ball sank below the horizon.

Chapter XI

A FEW RAPIDS

ROUNDING a bend in which we nearly boxed the compass, we came upon the straggling houses of Le Claire—Le Claire, Iowa, pilot town for the Mississippi rapids; one of the most vividly romantic villages on the entire river.

Its sole reason for existence in the old days was the stretch of treacherous boiling water that lay below. Every steamboat and every raft of logs had to stop here and take on a special rapids pilot to see it through; and these were the most daring of all that crew of river-men who formed the aristocracy of the valley in steamboat days.

Their spacious red-brick houses, ensconced on the low bluffs, were still there, sleeping in gentle decay with the rest of the town. For Le Claire was slipping off the map. The worst of the rapids could now be evaded by calm, safe government canals, and it was no longer necessary to call in expert help to pick one's way through a turbulent rock-strewn channel.

We landed at the old levee and found its pavement matted with weeds; perhaps no packet had nosed in there for years. Under a fine hard maple-tree we found the village had another claim to immortality: it was near here that Buffalo Bill spent his childhood..A gran-

ite block bore the inscription: "To the memory of Col. William F. Cody, My Boyhood Playmate, by Joe Barnes."

Up the levee we found Fred Schworm's steamboat store, virtually the same as it had been as long as any one could remember—except, of course, that now there were hardly any pilots left to use it. It was Sunday morning, but Mr. Schworm was there, "in case any of the boys dropped in." His notion of youth was made plain a little later when he referred to one of the pilots as "only seventy," and therefore too young to know much about steamboating.

While Schworm himself had never "been on the river," as the old-timers put it, he was known from one end of it to the other. His store was headquarters for pilots, such as were left. He invited us into the club-room—a grave honor, we understood—and we found a comfortable place, almost fussily tidy. Around the walls were photographs of every boat that had run the rapids since Mr. Schworm could remember, which was some time. On a long table in the center was a neat pile of almanacs and books of general information, evidently placed there to settle any arguments. A long strip of roller-toweling stretched the length of each wall at the presumable head-level, for those who wished to tilt back in their chairs. Small boxes of sawdust were placed handily by the chairs in case one needed them.

Only a straggling of the old skippers were left, but they came together at Fred's store, now and then, to talk over old times. The most famous was Orrin Smith, now about ninety years old, who took down the last log raft to run the Mississippi, only a few years ago.

One of the last of the packets was taking on a load

He was not there to-day, but we sought him out at his home. We found that he was still in command of a boat, the steamer *Lone Star*.

He told us the rapids were nothing to worry about now, but still it wouldn't do us any harm to keep a sharp watch in Moline Pool. To show what he meant, he told about the time he was in command of the largest log raft known in the history of the river.

"Some folks never worries about crossing a bridge till they gets to it, but that's not my way," he said. "When I backed that raft out into the river here, I was shooting the rapids already; and before I came to the first rock, in my mind I was passing under the bridge at Rock Island, sixteen miles below. There was only one chance in a hundred we could work it through. You may not worry about crossing over a bridge till you get there, but if you're going under it you had better start early."

It sounded a little like playing chess.

We walked down the street of the town again, and we felt that the old times were about all Le Claire had left. The surrounding farm land was not fertile enough to replace the lost river trade, and bit by bit the town seemed to be sinking back into the bluff from which it sprang. One old building after another was being abandoned and was falling to pieces; few were built to take their places.

Now two very different alternatives confronted the shanty-boat. One was the docile little canal formed by the Iowa bank and a narrow concrete strip about three hundred feet east of it.

By far the greater expanse of water lay beyond the

canal, and here the river was churning as we had never seen it. Great blotches of lather boiled up from the rocky bottom, and its level seemed to be sinking as it flung itself on. In place of the small red and black buoys to which we were accustomed, there were great pyramids of stone to mark the way for intrepid pilots who chose to shoot the rapids.

As for the little Ark, it nosed straight into the canal without so much as a moment's indecision. Now we were looking over the dike that separated us from the turbulent water; and when we saw foamy whirlpools swish and whirl up the stone pyramids, to splash back, in white feathers of spray, into the violent Mississippi, we were content with our little backwater.

The river out there was gradually sinking below us, for the canal was shut off at its end with a dam and lock and thus maintained the same level as at its beginning in Le Claire, while the river itself was rushing pell-mell down over a shelving rock bottom. Since there was no current in the canal, we were some time making our way down its length, but at last we arrived at the lock and were admitted into its concrete box. Solid iron gates swung to behind us as the skipper slipped a rope around a sizable hook imbedded in a niche.

"Set?" inquired the lock-master, over our heads. Quite, we assured him, and promptly there was a rush of water and the bottom gently dropped under us and the walls climbed higher over our heads. Then the gates at the other end opened and we proceeded on our way into rough water, but by no means such water as we had just been judiciously avoiding. This lock had only a ten-foot drop, a mere nothing, they

told us, compared with the Keokuk lock, which terminated Lake Cooper, one hundred miles below.

It was now considerably later than it should have been, for the slow canal and the process of locking had eaten up a good share of the afternoon; and there still lay before us Moline Pool, where Smith had warned us to watch sharp, and another strip of rapids avoided by another canal.

A confused river stretched ahead and it was at just about this time, as the first hint of darkness stole over the water, that we were tempted to throw our hitherto trustworthy guide, the government light-list, into the furious Mississippi. For now we could discover no relation between the channel marks it told us to look for and those that we actually saw. We didn't know whether we were in Moline Pool or in an adolescent Gulf of Mexico. All we could see was water and we went on over it. That seemed the thing to do. We were somewhere on a vast expanse of water which we could not explain, but theoretically at least the second series of rapids should not be far away. A wind was coming up and dark was really threatening when we came down at last to the foaming mouth of the lower rapids. We crossed to the Illinois side and caucused. The concensus of opinion aboard was that the thing to do was to tie up.

The Ark bounced up and down, chafing at its moorings like a nervous horse. We built a fire in the stove and entertained a talkative fisherman with a broad drawl, who showed us how to tie knots and make fish-nets and told us alarming stories about the water below the next locks, which he assured us was "narsty."

The wind went down about noon next day and our confidence came back. We were sure of making Davenport by night. But we kept the fire going, for it was a frosty day.

"Better keep them there ropes out of the water or they'll freeze up on you," the lock-master warned as he lowered us into the main river once more. And it did feel like that, too.

Out of the second long canal, the Ark was immediately caught up in a small whirlpool that nearly turned it end for end. We straightened it out and hastily consulted the light-list. There should be red and black buoys almost every tenth of a mile, but our glasses could pick out none of them—nothing but curling black water, oily in spots, riffled in others. It was getting dark once more and Davenport was still four miles off.

"Look out!" shouted the mate. We had come within a few inches of a warning buoy which had been sucked under the water by the force of the current. Yes, it was "narsty" water here! And that was why we hadn't seen the buoys. They were all sucked under. It was a logical explanation but not reassuring.

A moment later the skipper cocked the Ark almost on its ear to evade a black buoy suddenly discovered in a whirl of water. And next we had run nearly one hundred yards to the wrong side of a red one. We had vivid images of rock ledges just under the water, but nothing happened.

It grew dark and for the first time the skipper had to climb up on the roof of the cabin, while we were pursuing our erratic motion, to light the running-lamps. For this was no place to choose a landing; there were

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only jutting rock banks, as nearly as we could see over the black mass of water.

Another half-hour of nervous careening and we found ourselves close beside a high stone wall. With the flash-light we picked out a large iron ring that hung by a chain from the side, and gratefully steered for it. The water was so fast that we missed the first, but we caught a second.

The wall rose so high above the roof of the Ark that we could not tell where we were, but we supposed it was Davenport. And the ring through which our ropes were looped was most gratifyingly heavy, so the Ark rode the fast water with ease and we slept profoundly.

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Chapter XII

MISSISSIPPI MUD

A FRESH stern wind pushed us along, through the sunny afternoon, at a better pace than we had any reason to expect. Checking with the distances on the light-list, we found the old Ark was clipping off more than seven miles an hour; a terrific speed! By this reckoning we should spend the night at the head of Lake Cooper, a swollen forty-mile expanse of the river formed by damming at Keokuk, somewhere below.

But the sun was still high when we sighted the first of the floating channel marks, which meant that we were soon to be out on the flooded bottom-lands. And around the next bend were tree cemeteries. The banks of the river were receding to the vague distance and only the whitened trunks of trees which once had stood on dry land marked the old obliterated shore-lines, Former islands, flooded by the distant dam now, were ghostly groves of dead timber standing deep in water. The "lake" seemed to begin nowhere in particular; it lay before us, an ever widening sheet of water, fringed, as nearly as we could see, with shallow marshes.

It would be impossible to run the whole lake before night, and it was extremely doubtful that we should

find any safe landing-place if we ran on now and until dark. Besides, the lights were wide apart and when dusk came there would always be the danger of snags from some buried island. The skipper took the glasses and announced that he had sighted a pleasant sandy beach that would do for a mooring now. We could run the whole lake to-morrow.

As the Ark nosed its blunt prow over, the edge of the "beach" sank under its weight; there was nothing to stop it and it drifted right on over. For what had looked like firm sand was only matted marsh-grass floating over several feet of water. Here was another half-submerged island. We tied to a pair of stumps.

There was rain on the roof when we woke up and we looked out on a dim gray waste of water and sky, utterly desolate and forsaken. No forms could be distinguished at first. It was a barren world, unbroken by any sign of human life. Gradually, then, the grotesque, whitened branches of a dead tree reaching out of the water emerged through the fog, and far off we saw the faint blink of a lighted buoy.

We were lost in the flooded bottom-lands. Eventually, of course, they would end in the Keokuk dam, but we didn't know where we were now, and so there was no telling how far away that might be or what kind of water lay in between.

It would be a good thing to get an early start on this strange voyage. The rain and the fog probably would lift enough, as we got under way, to permit us to avoid the buried islands and the old shores. The skipper hurriedly untied all the lines and coiled them on their spikes. He pulled out the pike-pole, to push off.

It turned out to be a rubber pike-pole. Under the skipper's weight and muscle it bent almost into a U without breaking, and the shanty-boat never budged. We began to look around. The hull stood up several inches above its water-line! The river must have fallen in the night.

Gradually it dawned upon us that we were stuck. We were stuck in the mud. And nobody who has not had a personal acquaintance with Mississippi mud can know what that meant. It was more like glue than anything.

The skipper pulled his waders on and got down into it. For a dogged half-hour he pushed and pried, but the boat never moved an inch. The mate came out and helped, but the Ark would not stir. Presently, as we strained at the hull, a brisk east wind came up, and then it was all over with us. For the more we tried to push out, the deeper the wind pushed the Ark into the mattress of glue.

We had to go in to rest for a while. When the wind went down perhaps we could do something about it. Meantime we were most certainly here to stay for a while. The mate tried to amuse herself by making fudge, but the skipper sat gloomily gazing out the window, watching the wind-whip the leaden water toward us.

By and by our position began to seem to him undignified. Action! Something must be done. By themselves things could never get any better; they could only get worse, for every minute the waves were pushing us more firmly into the soft bottom.

He unfastened the motor from the stern of the Ark and transferred it to the nimble little *Salamander*. He

connected the two boats with ropes and grimly set out to pull the shanty from the mire. Gallantly the little boat stood up on its heel, bravely it ripped at the lines, but nothing happened. It made a right angle to the surface of the water, the skipper standing up to keep aboard at all, and it made a tempestuous fuming racket, but the Ark never quivered in the bed of mud.

Well, then, we were really stuck, hopelessly stuck.

We spent the rest of the afternoon quietly assimilating that fact. Perhaps next spring when the water came up, as it always did, it would raise the Ark and then we should be afloat again and could continue our journey? The mate was asking impudent questions. Our "island" was deep in water under its marsh-grass, and only a partial screen from further wastes of flooded land behind. Yes, there was water everywhere; and, so the mate observed, it had a certain perverse fascination.

There was one stern circumstance, however, which neither of us could laugh at with any show of success, and that was the condition of the larder. The bread-supply was running low; and then there was the egg situation. The grocer in the last town where we stocked up had recognized us only too surely as drifters, not substantial regular customers at all, and he knew that the scandal of the eggs he palmed off on us would never come back. The whole two dozen of them were in the river now. Most of them floated. Something ought to be done!

Well, there was one thing left to try. It was painful, but it was the only hope. We locked all the windows and drew the blinds, bolted the doors. With a powerful flash-light and a couple of life-preservers we

boarded the *Salamander* and pushed off to look for the nearest town. We glanced back over our shoulders at the Ark; well, it was a tidy outfit and undeniably worthy. But it was pathetic too, rather pathetic now. For the hull couldn't have been more than six inches under water and all the rest rose up, futile and ridiculous. With a sigh, we turned away, and left it there.

Down over the murky water shot the *Salamander,* darting between the ominous tree graveyards, following the vague, far channel marks. Around a great half-sunk island now; and there—so soon—behind the island, on the Illinois shore, a village clustered. It couldn't have been much more than three miles from the desolate and completely undiscovered-looking place where the Ark stood mired. We tied the *Salamander* below a sheer bank and climbed up to look at Dallas City.

The rain was coming down pretty hard and the unpaved street was floating in mud. We leaped from one wry plank to the next and waded gingerly through where there were no planks. And we went from store to store. But at all of them it was the same mysterious story: "Closed until after four." Moreover, there was hardly any one abroad. We racked our brains. Days of the week made very little difference on the river and we were not always sure about the calendar. Still, the skipper was ready to take his oath that this was a Wednesday; and no holiday, either.

A small boy enlightened us at last. All the merchants in the village had shut up shop in honor of the football game between the local high-school team and its bit-

terest rival. The game would be over by four and then we could buy whatever we needed. If we were in a hurry, though—obligingly he steered us around to the back door of a bakery, and then to the alley entrance of a grocery store. It seemed that they had to keep the fronts closed up for appearance's sake, but if you really needed something, why, you could get it.

With our precious bundles safely deposited in the *Salamander* we walked off now on the more important errand. Wandering along the swamped river-front, we came upon an old fish-market. This would be the place, the skipper believed, and began to prowl around the rear of the building. Down in the basement, squatting about a hot coal stove, a group of fishermen, still wearing their slickers and hip boots, sat pulling at their pipes.

Mud? Grover Layer believed he and his brother, there, could pull anything out of the mud! The two of them hitched up their boots without further question and reached for their nor'westers. We were off!

Each in his own john-boat, the two brothers followed the *Salamander* around the bend and up over the dim lake to where the Ark waited alone. Their technique now was magnificent to watch. One john-boat was tied astern of the cabin and the other left free to shove as necessity might demand. In a sort of seesaw fashion they jockeyed back and forth until at last the houseboat felt the motion and responded with a slight quiver. ("And see! she stirs! She starts . . . she seems to feel The thrill of life along her keel." . . . Something out of school-days suddenly emerged, significant for

the first time, from the shadows of the watching mate's mind.) Then they lashed their two boats together, swung about, and tugged the Ark free!

They thought they might as well tow us all the way down into town while they were about it. And so the Ark made her first journey—and we determined it would be the last, for the sake of our pride in her—under power other than her own. Their two small boats were harnessed bridle-fashion to the bow and like a pair of ponies they drew the shanty-boat through the gathering dark to Dallas City.

We were saying good-by when Grover suddenly had an inspiration:

"You're goin' to put in at Mormon town to-morrow, ain't you?"

"What's that?"

"Why, town o' Nauvoo, down the lake a piece. You gotta see that or you ain't seen nothin'. Place where old Joe Smith and his Saints used to hold forth. 'Course that was a while back, but some o' their houses is still standin'. They built to last, those guys."

Mystified, we promised. . . . Mormons!

Down below, in the early morning, we found the water rushing us from the verge of one clump of gaunt white trees to the next with all the swiftness of river current. As far as we could see, all had been desolated by the flooding waters. But it was heaven for the south-bound mallards and mud-hens. Sometimes a flock clustered so thick on the water that we mistook it for a sand-bar just showing above the surface, until, as we came close, it scattered into thousands of fluttering particles. Once, just ahead of us, a flock of Canada geese

issued a revelation, as was his wont, ordering the Saints to put up a hotel with a permanent suite for himself and his family, and they set about that.

Things went well now, better than ever before. The political power of the community in state elections was recognized by Lincoln, who saw that they were supplied with his campaign literature, and it resulted also in their obtaining a charter for the city which gave them almost unlimited powers. They were permitted to maintain a private army known as the Nauvoo Legion, technically a part of the state militia but actually an armed police force under the control of the church.

It was the Legion—showy, boastful, well equipped, with its imposing parades of two thousand men—that became a source of suspicion and fear in the countryside. Did they intend to conquer Illinois? . . . or Mexico?

Smith himself had been quoted as saying: "When the right time comes we will go over and take the whole State of Missouri. It belongs to us as our inheritance." For he could not forget the property they had been forced to leave behind them there, nor the indignity of his own arrest and indictment.

Now the Governor of Missouri demanded that Illinois surrender Smith and deliver him for trial on the old charges; he was arrested and obtained his freedom only through the help of Stephen A. Douglas. Several of the more prominent Saints apostatized at about that time, and one of them began to "expose" the Mormons and their ways, in long and detailed magazine articles. Nauvoo, the beautiful place, was represented as a second Sodom, a foul blot on the fair Midwestern

country-side. Smith thought it best to retire into hiding.

Then a tragic thing occurred: the Missouri governor was fatally shot at his home. Smith and another Mormon were promptly arrested, but the preliminary proceedings were tried at home, by their own magistrates, and they were as promptly released.

Unabashed, the prophet ran for President of the United States the next year, and then the fear that the Mormons were seeking more and always more power reached its peak. Political parties were discovering that their allegiance was too facile, that they were unscrupulous and unreliable. Smith and his brother Hyrum were arrested for a minor offense and this time the county rose up full-armed against him. He could not be tried at home; he was removed to Carthage.

There were twelve or thirteen hundred angry armed men in Carthage, to see that he should not escape them this time, and nearly three hundred more near by. One of these contingents of determined farmers was ordered to disband. Disband! And leave that serpent of Satan to wriggle his way out of this difficulty as he had out of all the others? Not they. With powder and mud they blacked their faces, and hurried down the road to Carthage.

They stormed the jail where Joe and Hyrum and a friend sat in a dark cell; they broke open the door and rushed pell-mell down the corridor. Hyrum and the third man were shot, but Joe Smith escaped them—jumped out the window, two stories down. The mob rushed out to see, half believing that by some miracle

We did not know where we were, but we felt at home

this schemer had made his escape once more. But he lay stunned upon the ground. Still they were not satisfied. Some one sat him up against the prison wall, and into his unconscious body they fired four shots. Joe Smith, prophet, was secretly buried under his temple.

The community carried on under Brigham Young in some prosperity for a time, until the final expulsion inevitably came and they were forced to take up their wandering once more, leaving behind them forever the neat streets and the fine white houses they had built in "the beautiful place."

The quiet, almost forgotten Mississippi Valley seemed to be fairly coming alive with ghosts of the ambitious, contentious past as we floated along. Adventurers and bandits, religious fanatics and traders had sought it out. That was the period of fermentation in American life, a restless age when all manner of freak growths sprang up and flourished briefly side by side with the slow, steady development of the young society. And it seemed that here, in the valley of the great water highway, the dissonant elements of expansion had most stridently and vividly mixed.

But now the river had been supplanted by a half-dozen quicker, surer—and what was most important—more controllable means of transportation. The Mississippi had never been safe or sure, it had always been a romantic gamble. Men feared it even while they made what use of it they could.

Here they had flooded forty miles of its fertile bottom-lands by building a great dam; they had shut up its current to supply electric power to the cities in the

valley. Well, it was good for something, then. There was one way men could get the best of it. We were told, when we reached the dam, that thirty-five acres of river-bottom had been dried up to build it. The wagon-loads of sand built into it would have stretched two thousand miles; there had been more than half a million barrels of cement.

It was, indeed, a magnificently terrifying lock into which the little Ark was ushered; it made the memory of the locks at the rapids dwindle considerably. But we came through and, deeply relieved, tied up below the rushing dam, at the smoky town of Keokuk.

Chapter XIII

"'TAIN'T MUCH"

IT LOOKED like an abandoned bootlegger's haunt as we peered through the glasses from mid-channel. Or possibly some loggers had put up their tents here for a while and moved on, long ago. It seemed a good place to tie up for the night. For one thing, the skipper said he thought he could cut firewood. But, though we didn't speak of it, both of us knew there was something else. An open spot in the forest is always alluring, for there is a mystery about anything that people have used for a time and abandoned. Blackened earth and a smudged rock where strangers have had their fire, a dented kettle their mulligan once steamed in, tent poles still reaching across space to one another, where people have slept—that's about as much as you ever know of them, but there is much to speculate about. It is a little like finding that your own bare foot will fit into an imprint left on a deserted sand beach.

As we came closer we saw that some one had once started to put up a log cabin here and later had apparently thought better of it. When we came ashore with the lines a strange thing happened. A dog began to bark. He barked furiously, desperately, as though a preposterous thing were happening. Large, gray, and nondescript, with frightened bloodshot eyes, he ap-

peared from the underbrush and plunged toward us. Then he backed off a few yards, still bellowing his outraged protests. Behind him the brush parted again as a small brown horse nosed curiously toward us.

Wherever we were, it was clear that we had blundered. We were intruders. The place was not abandoned; we had picked up no wilderness trail gone cold. The wanderer, with his animals, was still living here.

But then he came down to us. He was a strange lank youth in overalls that were stuffed into red hip boots. He wore, too, a sheepskin vest, woolly side out, and a blue-denim cap of the sort that you see on locomotive engineers. But more than of anything else we were aware of two surprisingly large ears, and between them a serious, friendly face covered with a black stubble. As we watched this strange being walk slowly through his trees to look at us, we couldn't help thinking we'd like him. The dog was quieted with one of his loose hairy hands, and he extended the other to the skipper.

"Good evenin', sir," he remarked. "Good evenin', ma'am."

Well, then, perhaps we were not intruders. Perhaps we were welcome on this young man's land.

"Bound down the river?" he asked.

And he did not mind if we tied up here for the night. He watched the skipper make the hawsers fast, and once he pointed to a good tree to use, but he did not seem to be in the habit of talking much. Perhaps that was a custom that dropped away if you lived in the forest. We did learn from him, though, that this was an island formed by the main channel and a slough cutting behind. It was about ninety acres in extent, and

this man owned it all. For the past year he'd been trying to make a farm of it. His name, he said, was Tobias Wall. Once he had lived in the Lake Cooper region.

"I started to build me a cabin here in the clearin', but the mosquitoes got so bad I quit. Move it up on high ground, yonder, at the other end, come spring."

The skipper asked a question:

"Got anybody to help you here?"

"Jest my two nags," said Tobias Wall. "No, ain't got nobody with me. Got the brown pony and a pinto and the dog. And I got a cat. Ain't got no kin left, that I know of. Oh, I like it here, all right. Like it fine. 'Tain't much, but I figger it's somethin' I kin call my own."

We were silent then. There was nothing—or perhaps there was too much—that we could answer. Somehow it was strange to have him say that. "T'aint much, but I figger it's somethin' I kin call my own." Three hundred years ago and more, the court of Elizabeth and the wits of London had smiled and then perhaps secretly sighed at that line. And in the theaters everywhere people had been doing it since. Now here on a tangled island lost in the Mississippi was a lonely youth spending all his care on something . . . a poor thing . . . but his own . . . and telling us that was the way he felt about it.

He consented to come as far as the shanty-boat porch, but not to sit down. His great rambling figure leaning in the doorway, he told us that he had lived on a shanty-boat as a boy, with his stepfather, who was a trapper in Lake Cooper. He hadn't liked it. So when the old man died and left him a thousand dollars he

did what he'd always wanted to do. Knowing the river, he found this island, bought it, and settled down to be a farmer. That was a year ago.

Only two and a half acres were cleared—he had spent the winter at it—and these would be planted to corn in a couple of months. He didn't have much machinery, because he had to haul everything in his rowboat from Quincy, up the river. So he had brought down a dismembered farm wagon and put it together. And he had a plow. But most of his work he did in the old way, by hand.

"Ever try raising hogs?" the skipper suggested. By this time Tobias Wall had been persuaded to accept tobacco for his pipe and the two men were getting on.

"Yep, I thought o' that. Bought me some hogs, and then I found out somethin' about them critters. Thought I could jest turn 'em loose and leave 'em forage in the woods. Well, them critters kin *swim*. Yessir, all five of 'em swam away on me. Ain't got a hog left."

He puffed silently at his pipe for a minute or two and we could see there was something on his mind. As he moved to go, he said it:

"You goin' down the river?"

"Yes, we're going down," said the skipper.

"How fur down you goin'?"

"Well, as far as we can. All the way, if we're lucky."

"Goin' all the way?" said Tobias Wall. "Down to the Gulf o' Mexico?"

"Going to try to."

"Well, I never! And whur'd you start at?"

"Up at the top. St. Paul."

"Started clear up at the top and you're goin' clean down to the end? Well, I never!" Tobias was looking off up-river. "And you jest happened to pull in here at my place to-night, by chance like? Well, I . . ." His voice trailed off. "Well, I sure wish you and ma'am a pleasant trip. And if you want anything to-night, jest let me know."

Chapter XIV

THE PIKERS

THE shanty-boat bounded around Swift Point in choppy water and then slid with evident relief into the shelter of Turtle Island, proceeding now at a gentle pace that permitted us to peer into glades, deep and dark, that once had been the haunts of Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. Not absolutely a desert island now—for there was an occasional shack by the water's edge—it was still mysterious enough to be fertile soil for piratical exploits, and perhaps youngsters from the village were using it sometimes for such purposes even in these days.

We crossed over toward the old Hannibal levee—St. Petersburg, Mark Twain called it—where the *Belle of Calhoun,* one of the last of the packet-boats, was now taking on a load of freight. From the water the village looked as peaceful as it should. The stone packet offices were left as they must have been in the days when the whole community used to sleep except at intervals when the cry of "Steamboat!" aroused it to a brief burst of activity. Now a crew of negro roustabouts were heaving crates up the stage-plank of the *Belle.* But a little farther down the red cobblestone wharf an older negro sat half drowsing against a cluster of pilings, indifferently watching their labor from under his misshapen hat.

The Ark was tied near the home of a most kindly woman, who came out to talk with us and ask where we came from and where we were going. She felt that we ought to see all the sights of Hannibal! There was her car, and she had nothing in particular to do this morning. She would drive us about, so that we shouldn't miss anything. . . .

"Now, this is what we used to call Palmyra Avenue," she began. "But they're calling it Mark Twain Boulevard now."

As we went along, that little remark began to seem typical of the newer Hannibal, the town behind the levee. Not that the place looked new! But it had a modern feeling, and part of it was the new-found pride in its illustrious son, the boy who had grown up on its water-front almost unnoticed. Our friend had to make that remark, in various forms to suit various objects she pointed out, at frequent intervals, for a great many seemed to have submitted to recent rebaptism.

The Chamber of Commerce had discovered Mark Twain. His name greeted us from sign-posts and billboards, from street-markers and restaurants, wherever we happened to look. Arrows pointed the way at every corner—to the Mark Twain Spring, to the cave where Tom and Becky Thatcher got lost, to the rather girlish statue of Huck and Tom at the foot of "Cardiff" Hill, and to the austere one of Sam Clemens himself, back on the bluff over the river.

They could exploit him if they wanted to, for all we cared. They hadn't spoiled the fun of Hannibal; nothing could, for any one who had read about old St. Petersburg; under the thin veneer of progress it was

almost exactly as it was described in the books. We could stop at the edge of Hell's Half Acre—a block of vividly painted house-fronts, dens of vice once but now a gaudy little assemblage of chain stores!—and look at the hill down which the gang had rolled the boulder that would have demolished the blacksmith shop had it not happened to jump clear over it. Even the smithy was still there; only it had been turned into a filling station.

The Mark Twain house itself felt familiar the minute we saw it, once we had forgotten the formal little light-globe over the door which informed visitors of its identity. A small story-and-a-half dwelling, somewhat in need of paint, built flush with the sidewalk—this was where Mark Twain grew up. And, for that matter, this was where Tom Sawyer lived with his sissy brother, and Mary, and Aunt Polly, and the cat that didn't care for Pain Killer.

Just around the corner from the house was the alley fence which Tom ingeniously permitted himself to be assisted in whitewashing, and around in the little back yard was the outside stairway leading from a second-story chamber, where Tom used to sneak out on deeds of daring when Aunt Polly thought he was fast asleep.

In the living-room Annie Wirtz, the custodian of the home, greeted us. No attempt had been made to furnish the place as it was when Sam Clemens lived here; rather, it had become a hit-or-miss museum of things he used and of pictures. The walls were lined with photographs of the author, posed with one or another of Hannibal's somewhat less illustrious citizens. Suspended from a wire in the corner was a cane chair

draped with the United States flag; this had been the author's favorite seat, Mrs. Wirtz believed. On the floor below it was a wonderful antique typewriter he had used.

Our pockets as we left the house were filled with seeds. In a determined effort to do her full duty by us, Mrs. Wirtz presented each of us with a handful of the seeds of a morning-glory that grew in the back yard. Perhaps, then, the shanty-boat ought to have window-boxes? But the river-men had warned us when we fitted up that any such useless trimmings would only "catch wind" and we couldn't afford them. Regretfully we sowed a trail of Mark Twain's morning-glory behind us, across the town of Hannibal.

We found that in these days you didn't have to be a souvenir-hunter to collect souvenirs. For we had no more than showed our heads near the entrance of the famous cave, a little later, than the custodian began automatically hacking off a crystal from its wall, and as we entered he turned it over for us to keep. A fragment of the famous Mark Twain cave for your very own! Oh yes, in Tom Sawyer's town they had learned how to deal with tourists.

Then we walked down into the bowels of the earth. Mr. Cameron was following behind with a spitting gasoline lantern that caught up the jutting rock walls in beams of greenish light till they seemed about to crush us, till the clay floor threatened to drop away before us and the fretted ceiling was incredibly remote. At every turn we passed dark alleys and deep sinking passageways that led farther into the unknown recesses of darkness. Sometimes great vaulted cham-

bers, their walls damp with ceaseless dripping, opened abruptly before us, and then again we were lost in the shrinking tunnel.

Aladdin's Palace was there, and the Human Foot, the Alligator, and the Devil's Backbone—curiously realistic formations. There was the cross that marked the spot where the money was buried, and here the blocked entrance where the starved dead body of Indian Joe was found. Mr. Cameron showed us the narrow crevasse from which Tom and Becky, after they had wandered helplessly through the cave for days, their last candle burned up, had finally made their escape to daylight.

Becky herself, who was Mrs. Laura Hawkins Fraser, had died only a short time before. They said that to visitors she would politely tell which parts of the book were based on fact and which were not. She was not along, she would explain, when Tom was lost in the cave. You might feel that she hadn't thought so much of Tom, really, but she invariably concluded that she had "had the greatest respect for Mr. Clemens." However that was, she was always called upon to preside over the ceremonies when a new Mark Twain hotel or statue was dedicated; and hardly a day passed that some devotee did not go out to visit her. Thus the old lady's whole function had become that of showing the world how Becky Thatcher grew up.

Before we left we took tea at the Mark Twain Hotel. Then we bought a dozen cans of Mark Twain milk and filled our water-cans at Mark Twain Spring. The town fathers, we supposed, were even now studying

some new civic improvement to be named after the illustrious son. Well, it didn't matter. We walked down to the levee, and there was the sleepy old water-front, just as it had always been. Leaning up against his cluster of pilings was the old negro we had seen when we came in the morning; he was still drowsing in the sun. It was the same old river town, after all.

The Ark slipped on down along the rusty Missouri bluffs, dexterously avoiding the swell sent over by the towboat *Nauvoo* pushing two quarter-boats—floating barracks for the crews repairing the channel—two small office boats, and an empty barge. A little later the *Mamie Barrett* came puffing along behind two barges deeply laden with cement. And in the afternoon —it was a big day for steamboating—the *General Ashburn* panted furiously up the river with four steel barges. A banner strung from stem to stern announced that she carried an "all-river shipment," down the Ohio from Pittsburgh, bound up the Mississippi now for Minneapolis.

She gave us a rollicking wake and for a full mile the shanty-boat vainly tried to regain its poise. The swell flattened out just as we were turning in to another Missouri village wharf.

There was something special going on in Clarksville this afternoon. An audience of small boys dressed in suspicious and not too comfortable neatness, country boys on an excursion to town, watched us tie up. And about the muddy front street, above, there was a curious flavor. Shifting groups of men and women gossiped leisurely, with inflections quite unlike the speech we had heard so far. Here and there an old negro stepped in

and out among them, bowing and smiling, doffing his hat; and in the roadway automobiles mingled casually with buggies and mule teams, and with an occasional archaic surrey, moth-eaten but scrupulously brushed. Then a man threaded his way through on a sleek chestnut hunter, waving his cap to some one on the corner. Like country children, ourselves, we stood and stared. This was not a Missouri town; this was the South, pure and simple.

Curious to know what had brought so many townspeople out, we walked over to the Riverview Hotel. That large stone structure surveying the wharf must have been built in steamboat times, and then perhaps lumber barons, horse-traders, and planters and their wives crowded the lobby and there was music and the clink of glasses. These days, though, we suspected, most of the rooms would be dark.

There was a certain air of excitement in the ancient paneled lobby this evening, however. A group of men sat nervously chewing, spitting, and drawling to one another in low tones, and a small colored boy in a smartly laundered white-linen jacket was dispensing information and cigars with a high sense of his importance.

An election had been going on to-day, he told us; that was the cause of the unusual life in the village. All the surrounding township had poured in to-day to vote; and now they were waiting to hear the returns, doing a little private trading on the side to pass the time. We wandered down the street again.

The town itself seemed a bit tarnished. Against its brilliant copper-and-purple autumn hills the buildings

were raw and dingy. Paint was peeling and bricks that had fallen out were not replaced. The bare muddy street rolled along past a good many empty store-fronts, and the ambitious "Commercial Block" seemed to be scarcely in use. The wharf itself was a mass of weeds and rubbish. Men were still walking their teams down to the river's edge for water, but that was about all it seemed to be good for now. The tremendous hotel looked a little ridiculous, and the few spacious red-brick and clapboard houses, with their broad pillared piazzas, were down at heel.

Still, it didn't seem to make any difference to anybody. The townspeople didn't care. The women with their market baskets, the men, in their broad black-felt hats, loitering on the street corners, were entirely content and unconcerned.

It was young John Roberts, publisher of the local paper, who, having watched us stroll inquisitively up and down the dark streets, joined us presently and explained about Clarksville.

The first thing to remember about the place, he told us, was that it was a part of Pike County. Surely we knew about Pike County. Hadn't we read our Parkman? Ah, then we remembered. The place was the source of the word "piker." But as so often happens with home-made words, this one had quite lost its original meaning, which, as Parkman tells the story, reflected more credit upon the community than might be supposed. During the uncertainties of the 'forty-nine gold rush a man from here could be depended upon to be a gentleman and pay his debts. This tradition was exploited by confidence men and reprobates from any

and all counties in the United States until nearly everybody was claiming extension of credit as a resident of Pike County, and the name became a byword.

Its residents were still mostly kinsfolk. Even if they were not directly related they were pretty sure to be connections of some sort and there was a feeling of solidarity. This was because they all had a common background and a common story. They were descendants of a handful of Virginia families who migrated westward in the early years of the past century, in search of richer land when the properties they held at home proved insufficient to support their slave establishments. They carried their great households out into the unknown West, traveling by wagon to Pittsburgh, there embarking in packets down the Ohio River and finally traveling up the Mississippi.

The fruitful land included in the Louisiana Purchase, lately acquired from Napoleon, had been glamorously heralded in the East and the old South, and the portion chosen by these Virginia immigrants amply justified the claims. Their village was laid out on the site of a fur-trading post established earlier by another Virginian, Col. William Clark (a brother of George Rogers), who with Lewis surveyed the Northwest Territory. The town was named for the colonel.

Life on the hilly Mississippi River bank continued much as it had been in the Old Dominion, except that the new colonists prospered better. They bred horses, mules, and stock, planted orchards on the sunlit slopes rolling back from the river valley, and sowed fields of grain. They were pardonably cocky about the beauties

They warned us of eddies

and the wealth of their new land. At harvest-time in 1867, the "Clarksville Sentinel" boasted:

> There have been some heavy crops of wheat raised around Clarksville this season, but a field raised in partnership by Messrs. Givent & Elgin, beats any we have heard of yet. These gentlemen had a field of twenty acres which yielded 36 bushels to the acre, and they sold it in this market for $2.00 per bushel, or $1440 for the crop. This is $72 per acre and land as good as this can be bought for less money per acre. Think of this, ye poor devils, who eke out a miserable subsistence among the flinty hills of New England and Pennsylvania.

The produce was carried up or down the river to the metropolitan markets. And it was a romantic place to live, for the world streamed by its doors. Steamboats, barges, and rafts were always moving on the river, and men and women from distant lands were coming by to seek new homes.

Much of the activity and the glamour, much of the ambition was gone now, but men and women lived pleasantly here still, for many old-time customs lingered on. Most men kept hounds and the calendar was rather more a matter of one hunting season after another than of numbered weeks and months. Perhaps the people were a little out of touch with the rest of the world; it didn't seem to matter.

Presently we walked over to join a group who had gathered about a loud-speaker fastened to a telegraph pole on the vacant river side of the street, facing the row of houses and stores. The returns were beginning to come in. Country people were sitting expectantly in automobiles and buggies, eating from paper sacks as

they waited. With the first announcements from scattered precincts, the crowd dropped its arguments, to listen. One enthusiast, pleased by what he heard, leaped to the middle of the street, waving his arms and shouting, hoping, perhaps, to raise a cheer from the crowd. Intent upon the loud speaker, they silently drew away from him and knotted closer.

But these were the general state election returns. The outcome of their own local voting was to be published with less formality. At about nine o'clock two men came from around the corner, each of them carrying a long printed slip. One of them shouted into the crowd:

"Hi there, Harry! want to see your vote?"

People stepped back and silently watched a man in a gray suit, carefully pressed, emerge from among them and join the two men in a doorway.

"Got 'em all signed and swore to?" he inquired.

Matches flickered for a moment in the doorway as the men handled their strips of paper.

"Sure thing," said one of them, "and here's the congratulations."

The crowd heard and broke into applause for the election of Harry Carroll.

We heard an old man who stood behind us drawling to himself:

"First Republican sheriff since 'way back yonder before my recollection. What would my pappy say if he was here to-night?"

Presently the radio announcements began to peter out, and just as the crowd was scattering, a man and his wife came down the street. On the man's back was

a bulging flour-sack, large enough to cause him to stoop.

"Carryin' Harry's vote home; eh, Gillam?" somebody called.

"That's it, sir, that's jest about it." And the election commissioner, followed by his faithful wife, proceeded into the darkness with his burden.

Gradually then people began to slap the reins on their horses' backs and to step on their starters. Groups of men and women walking home disappeared around the corners.

PART II

HIGH RIVER

Chapter XV

WAYWARD WATER

A VAST yellowish-gray mud-flat stretched over to the west of us and beyond it an expanse of water, almost the same color, reached out of sight. The Missouri River, the Big Muddy, was coming into the Mississippi. The Ark headed out into midstream to watch the waters mix. We passed over a series of smoldering eddies and then the clear green of the upper river was met by the huge dun flood from the west. For a space the two waters seemed to flow side by side and distinct, neither merging with the other. Then an occasional muddy boil welled up in the midst of the green; and as we swept around a sharp bend, the upper-river water was lost. It had taken on the mud; it was all brownish water now.

Well, the fair upper river was behind us; we were coming on down toward St. Louis, which served as the northern boundary of the lower river, the broader, deeper water highway where navigation had always been, and perhaps still was, more important and more active. We were getting on. Soon, perhaps, we should be crossing the Dixie line, and it would be warm all winter. We were getting on!

A thick pall of coal smoke smothered the valley below, and in it we passed blithely over the ominous

Chain of Rocks, which our channel guide had expressly warned us against, and we were almost under Eads Bridge before we realized that we had arrived at the very heart of the St. Louis wharf. Hastily we tied the shanty-boat to an iron ring at the bottom of the levee.

For a moment we stood still, looking a little regretfully up and down. The place was virtually deserted. This, of course, was the very same wharf where once there had been so much doing that waiting packet-boats sometimes had to moor three deep out into the channel. For St. Louis was at one time the center of commerce on the Missouri, the Ohio, and the upper and lower Mississippi. Back up the street, not far from where we stood, there had been a luxurious pilot clubhouse where skippers from all the rivers gathered to swap their yarns.

There were, even now, a number of small work boats, we saw as we walked along. And then we found a packet loading. We stood by to watch perspiring roustabouts urge reluctant mules and protesting pigs up the stage, at the shouts of a huge and even more generously perspiring first mate. Presently we were conversing with Mr. Street, pilot of the *Cape Girardeau*. This steamboat made a weekly trip, he told us, between a town of the same name, about one hundred and thirty miles down the river, and St. Louis. She carried a miscellaneous cargo—anything she could get—of cattle, package freight, and passengers.

We waited to see her back out, and not until her fuming stacks had disappeared down the bend did we turn toward town. Then in the Jefferson Memorial Museum we found what for a long time, more or less

consciously, we had been looking for. There was a great store of material from which, if you read carefully, a picture gradually emerged of what a town of this sort used to be like when the rivers were important.

It seemed that it took the flatboats of the eighteenth century, and of the early nineteenth, from three to four months, depending on the weather and the water state, to pull up through the wilderness from New Orleans to St. Louis with the foreign luxuries for which the prosperous French of this inland city were waiting; less than half as long to return with the raw materials and the few domestic manufactures. But it took, either way, an almost violent determination, an almost ferocious courage to make the run. Many barges never came to port, never were heard from at all; or their crews, either. With their linen and rum, glass and sugar, the boats were lodged on a submerged mud-bank in some desolate bend, abandoned as hopeless; they were snagged in water unexpectedly low, their hulls gashed, and left to sink; or they were overwhelmed by pirates, their crews massacred, their cargoes looted. Then linens and silver from France, blown glass from Bohemia, syrup from New Orleans were stored for a time in outlaw cabins on the hidden chutes and bayous, later to be sold piecemeal.

These flatboats were moved, one way or another, by man-power; and what men they required! The usual thing was to row, up against the current as well as down, straight through northwesters that piled waves high over the men at the oars, straight through at any cost. Sometimes men with tow-ropes ran and stumbled

and leaped along the wildly overgrown banks, around the bends, pulling the laden barges after them. Occasionally it was possible to use a sail. And then there was a system of poling: men ran along the sides of the barges in relays, on a "running-board," turning the pole over to the next at the end and running back. It was exhausting work and it required the toughest, most desperate, neediest men, white or black.

But along came the *New Orleans,* pioneer steamboat on the Mississippi. Piloted by a Roosevelt, she made the trip down the Ohio from Pittsburgh in 1811, and that changed everything. The river and its tributaries leaped into a commercial and social significance out of all proportion to their former value. Soon the new boats were leaving St. Louis for the Missouri and the wilds of the Yellowstone, traveling up the Ohio for Louisville and Pittsburgh and down the Mississippi for Natchez and New Orleans. As yet not much attention was being paid to the upper river; the northern valley was scarcely settled.

Rival steamboat companies, rival pilots outdid one another to clip days, then weeks, off the speed record for the up-river trip from the Gulf, and now that travel was cheap, and so quick, immigrants began to pour along the rivers by hundreds and then by thousands, to stake out farms in the fertile valleys just opening up. The river was suddenly important; perhaps it was the most important factor of all, in this age of general westward expansion.

On June 2, 1821, ten years after the first steamboat tried the river, the packet *Washington* splashed up to the crowded St. Louis levee after a successful run from

New Orleans with a cargo of foreign and native goods. She carried an undetermined quantity of alum, molasses, muscatel raisins; of chinaware, linen, and glass; of coffee, chocolate, spermatic candles; some bar iron, a couple of fagots of steel, and perhaps twenty dozen corn-hoes. And she carried:

10 doz. champagne
10 bbls. New England rum
10 doz. bitters
2 pipes Madeira
2 pipes Teneriffe
2 pipes sherry
2 casks port
4 pipes brandy
4 pipes Holland gin
2 casks Jamaica spirits

A pipe was a cask twice the size of a hogshead, and containing approximately one hundred and forty gallons.

By 1850 the paddle-wheel boats were making the up-stream trip from New Orleans in amazingly quick time. It was taking them just six days. And now they lay moored three deep out into the channel at St. Louis! Whistles were always blowing as steamboats from Pittsburgh, Natchez, Kansas City, even from Dubuque, were pulling in and backing out all day long; all night long, too. The levee-front was the center of life, the heart of the community. The Southern planter, come up to sample the life of the metropolis or possibly to attend a business conference, picked his way through a swarm of white men, brown men, and mules, between the water's edge and the solid row of warehouses on

the front street, among heaped cotton bales, kegs and casks and boxes, stepping hastily aside at the shouts of men with skins like melting chocolate who were rolling fragrant hogsheads, tossing crates from hand to hand.

They carried two million tons of goods over the rivers to St. Louis harbor in 1880. But that was just about the crest of the wave. Soon, very soon, the railroads began to cut in on the freight as they already had on the passenger trade. Gradually at first, and then with precipitate suddenness, water commerce fell off. It accomplished little for the river pilots to spit at the tracks being laid impudently close beside their own stream. In ten years more it was over. The whole thing was over, the river was virtually abandoned.

Still, St. Louis had survived somehow! It had survived pretty well. Indeed, to our eyes, after many weeks of villages, it was a glamorous metropolis, glittering with lights and shrieking city sounds. The nights on the river, alone, and at the wharves of the little lost villages, had been very dark and silent; we had hardly realized. The noisy vitality of the city came to us now as something new and fresh, as if we had been on some remote dark continent; and like children we began to amuse ourselves with what it had to offer. We danced in a hotel dining-room, we went to the theater, and then we danced again afterward. Very tired at last—it was appallingly late by our reckoning—we came down to the still wharf again to look for the shanty-boat.

Something very strange had happened to it. It was lying at a thirty-degree angle, its landward end fast in the mud below the edge of the levee and its outward end considerably deeper in water than was good for it.

The mud had been under water in the morning; the river had apparently sunk. Sunk three feet while we were away, playing in the city. There was nothing to do but to take off our good clothes as quickly as possible, get into sweaters and boots, and come out and push the hull loose.

In the morning the river was still falling and the skipper let out long lines to allow the boat to float out from shore, where there was more water. That ought to last! We went back into the city.

But apparently there was no telling what the Mississippi would do, down here in the big lower river. Next morning we found ourselves rocking gaily in deep water a long way out from the levee. The river had decided to rise, now! It was the wayward Missouri that was to blame, we learned from the river-rats, for it was upsetting all remembered history with a November rise, and pouring its swollen waters into the Mississippi till now this river also was swelling rapidly.

The water-level continued to mount several feet each twenty-four hours, until finally the shanty-boat was tied to the railroad tracks at the very top of the wharf and the mud where we had got stuck in the beginning was buried under thirty feet of water. A little more and the railroad tracks would be under water. In some towns along the Missouri the tracks were already covered, they told us, and the wheels of the trains ran through inches of water. Somewhere, up that way, culverts had been washed out. It gave us a queer ominous taste of what a real river flood might mean. It was unlikely in winter; it never happened. This rise was in itself almost unprecedented and the men who knew the

river believed that it would not last very long, that the water could not rise much higher. But suppose now that the river did just keep on coming up, slowly but inevitably, nothing to stop it, and poured over into the streets, into basements, and then up through the floors. No wonder they were afraid of the river, down here. There was no telling what it might do.

The swollen current was rushing by at a high speed, carrying with it logs and nests of driftwood, and once or twice whole trees with roots and branches, fallen into the stream when the soft mud bank had given way under the onslaught of the increased current.

The fast river looked good to us. We thought we'd take advantage of its current as long as it might last, so we set out on the rest of our journey in the general direction of New Orleans.

Chapter XVI

PULLING SOUTH

THE Ark turned out into the midst of the driftwood tumbling southward and the running current carried us past miles and miles more of St. Louis water-front until the city was behind us at last and we were back with our old wild river.

Water boiled up sometimes in a noisy rushing eddy, spitting driftwood, and then flung itself magnificently down around the big bend. We were passing inundated bottom-lands, swamped pastures. Soft mud banks were crumbling and bushes lurched into the current. A small rowboat which had been carelessly tied, then a part of an old pier were washed down before our eyes. The doubled current tore at the banks, stealing whatever stood in its way, carrying it along.

Cluttering up the channel with it, too. We had to be on tiptoe to keep clear of the driftwood, lest twigs and branches catch in the propeller. The shanty-boat veered off to escape a cluster, only to find that one heavy soaked log had detached itself from the rest and wheeled over our way, too late to be avoided. Then we listened, breathless, while it clumped along under the hull and out again. So it went, time after time, for the floating wood had a perverse preference for the very water we needed—the fastest, deepest water. It was always thickest in the best channel.

River-men from away up above, if they hadn't happened to travel, would scarcely have recognized as their Mississippi this immensely broad brown sweep of water. It was wider and darker, and somehow we felt that it must be deeper and more dangerous as well. The sparkling marshes and the vivid yellow strips of sand were gone; there were no more green pools shadowed by projecting cliff walls. The east was an unbroken stretch of young leafless willows, yellowed with the late autumn, and below them a broad whaleback sandbar, whitish and vast, stretched out of sight. Round, dwarfed bluffs, red rock streaked with layers of white, huddled over the mud-bank across the way. The water pushed heavily, darkly along.

The little Ark seemed to have dwindled as it ran over all this river. Especially when it had to follow the swiftest current to midstream, it felt very small and helpless. There was sullen water down here in the lower river and it was not strange that men dreaded it. There could be no limit to its powers once it was really roused in flood. So the people built walls of earth along its banks—those other, more famous levees of the lower river. Up above, "levee" was only another name for the wharf; below it meant the necessary protecting wall thrown up in unbroken line to hold back the rising river. We had seen only a few such levees as yet, but probably a little farther along, when the Ohio and some of the other great Southern rivers were added, we should be seeing them much of the time.

This rough river would put the fear of the Lord into one. It acquired half-legendary perils. From some of the river-rats we had lately heard dire warnings of the

whirlpools set up at the bends in high water, and each seemed to have his own conception of the dangers. They had seen great trees thrashed to pulp, or upended and pulled in, never to reappear. Boats as large as ours had been sucked under. Steamboats had been wrecked; or whirled round and round, unable to escape the circling currents.

For ourselves, we thought it best to add a grain of salt to the ominous forewarnings. Still, we were taking no chances. It was wisest to hold to the straight water.

A couple of hours below St. Louis we saw something that gave us both a start. It was another traveling shanty-boat, the first we had ever seen actually in motion, besides our own. We passed quite close, to wave at our fellow voyagers and get a good look at them.

The little cabin was stained dark green, and there seemed to be only one small window on each side. The cabin itself took up only a part of the hull, so that the forward and after decks were open. A couple of shirts were hanging on a line, waving over the head of a figure that sat bending and rising out there. She hadn't a motor! A man was rowing her. Then we saw that a pair of oarlocks had been fastened up forward, too, and a boy was rowing at that end. The mother's head was discernible over a dish-pan inside. She waved back! But her men-folks were too busy keeping the wandering household in the channel and out of the drift.

As we passed them we wondered if they had far to go. They were moving to a new place, perhaps; and if they found something they liked, they'd just stay there and fish for their living. Well, it was easier get-

ting about now, with the high water, as long as it lasted.

It seemed to be an epidemic! For a little later the mate discovered a bulky looking john-boat in the distance, and when we came close we saw that it was loaded with burlap bags, crammed full. An old man sat at the tiller, and with him were a woman and a little girl. All three of them were anxiously scanning the river ahead; they scarcely looked up as we came by.

Moving-time on the river. Lucky for them that the water had come up all of a sudden now when it wasn't expected. When they had thought it would be low and sluggish until the spring, it suddenly, unaccountably rose. They probably didn't waste any time wondering about it when they saw that: just bundled together all they had and put out into the fast water, down-river bound. They were going to Arkansas, perhaps, where it was warm and living was easier. And because the river happened to rise late in the autumn, like this, they could get on toward the warm weather before winter really set in.

Meanwhile our own shanty-boat had been doing itself proud. We ran as far that afternoon as we had ever done in a whole long day. It came time to look for a mooring, and this wasn't easy with the water tearing at the banks and the mud crumbling in. The skipper sighted a stream mouth, just in from a point of land, that looked good to him. He headed that way, quartering up-stream to keep from being carried past. But we had not been careful enough, the current was too strong. The Ark swung by the little opening and down toward the point.

Presently the mouth of another small stream turned up, and this time the skipper figured out his approach with extreme precaution. Just as we headed in, he turned off the motor, expecting the Ark to glide into the quiet water of her own inertia. But the water was not so quiet as it had looked to be. And if ever it had been a stream pouring into the river, it was not so now; perhaps the flooding Mississippi had reversed it. At any rate, the powerless Ark was borne along and deposited rather harshly against a cluster of reaching willows. But the water was quiet there, and, of its kind, this was a landing. We made fast.

The Ark was scarcely secure before the creaking of oars and then a shout brought us out to see what was up.

Three small rowboats were heading for our cove. In the first were two trunks, atop one of which perched an old lady in a tasseled cap. A man was rowing her. Two children followed in the other boats, with smaller boxes and bags and a crate of chickens. More immigrants, "pulling" south in the high water.

The skipper helped them tie their little skiffs and then the man and woman prepared to make camp. It was plain that they were tired and stiff, but they were cold, too, and a fire had to be made. The mate asked the woman if she wouldn't come aboard the Ark and rest for a little. She shook her head.

"No, thank you. Gotta feed these young ones, I reckon."

Well, but wouldn't they all come in, then, and eat where it was warm?

Oh, they reckoned they'd manage, camping. They'd

have to do it more than once before they got down to where they were going—if they ever did get there. They thought they might as well get used to it now as later, thanks just the same.

Camp did not include a tent. A piece of canvas was rolled out over the weeds and a dilapidated leaking mattress laid on top. Then a couple of shaggy blankets were spread over that, and the bed was made. A piece of salt meat was fried over the open fire; and this, with a pot of coffee and a loaf of bread, was supper.

They made room for us beside their fire while they were eating.

"Followin' the river, are you?" said the father. "Yeah, same with me. Me and the wife and my two boys. We had a farm, o' sorts, up-state a piece. Worked it a good long time, ever since we got married, but never could git nothin' out of it. All rocks, you know. And then this summer my hog died on me. Cholera got him. So I saw it was no use, and first chance I got to sell out, I took it. Then this high water come along and we lit out for it, bag and baggage. How fur down you goin'?"

We said we didn't know. New Orleans, if we were lucky.

"Well, down Louisiana way's where we're headin' for, ourselves. They say it's a reg'lar garden country down there. Perennial summer—that's what they say. My brother-in-law, he gits two crop a year out o' his land in Louisiana. He says they don't have no rocks at all. Don't know what a rock looks like. Jest soil, pure soil. It must be a mighty fine country. Well, that's where we're bound for, now."

As soon as they had finished eating, all four of them rolled up together on the mattress. We too went to bed, uneasily hoping their small skiffs would carry them safely over the treacherous river, down to their Garden of Eden. In the morning they were gone; they must have started before daylight. There was nothing but the little black place where their fire had been, and the matted weeds on which they had slept.

Chapter XVII

"THE LORD COMETH"

OLD Ste. Genevieve, a mile or more inland, was now a peaceful village of perhaps seven hundred souls who whitewashed their cottages, kept their lawns cleaned, trimmed their shrubbery, and in their conversation used an occasional Old World idiom not often heard in these times. Back in the eighteenth century it had seemed to be promised a different destiny. It was on the river then. All this territory was bandied jealously between France and Spain, and the town was nearly twice as big, rivaling St. Louis as a river port in the most significant of all portions of the Mississippi Valley—from the point of view of fortification as well as trade—between the Missouri and the Ohio River mouths. It stood close by the water then; the river has built up all this land in the century and a half since, elbowing the town back.

Before Spain, France had claimed the land. Marquette and Joliet had come by to raise the French flag in the valley, La Salle had passed. Frenchmen from Quebec and New Orleans settled here nearly two hundred years ago. When this west bank went to Spain, a fort was built here by the river, a defense against Fort Chartres, which the French had thrown up a few miles down on the other side. There was not much left of

the ancient Spanish masonry now, but some there was. A comfortable old white house, deep in a garden, now and for several generations past the property of the Papin family of St. Louis, stood on what remained of the fort. Monsieur J. Vion Papin suggested that we come in and see it for ourselves.

The foundation walls of the fort were eight feet thick, of stone plastered over. They served as basement for the present house, built over them early in the past century. Monsieur Papin led us below, and down a passageway to what now served as a sort of tap-room. Once it had been put to grim enough use. Our host slid a bolt and swung a heavy plank door and we stood in the dungeon. It was difficult to see at first, for the only light came from a narrow rectangular window cut through the deep wall and covered with an iron grille. Below it a stone seat had been built against the cold white wall. There was nothing else, except for the stone floor and the heavy hewn timbers of the ceiling. But it was considered good enough lodging, in those days, for a stubborn Indian chief or for a frontier soldier who had been caught trying to make his escape back to civilization. We closed the door and with some relief came up again, into the garden.

Monsieur led us to some chairs that were placed below a tremendous chestnut-tree. This, he said, had been called the Council Tree in the earliest frontier days, before there was a permanent settlement at Ste. Genevieve. There was not much use guessing how old the tree itself might be. It had been the appointed meeting-place, each spring, for the returning trappers and the Indian hunters; under its shelter they had made

their bargains; blankets and whisky, beads and muskets in return for pelts.

Spain, after all, had not held on very long; it was a French province again for a brief time before Jefferson bought the whole Louisiana territory for the United States, and so it was the French atmosphere that prevailed, and the French customs, even until now. In Ste. Genevieve they were still celebrating their own particular kind of New Year: they held their version of the "Gaienné" of provincial France, when old and young put on fancy costumes and masks and went out to sing and dance in the streets. And there were the neat gardens, the prim houses, and the quaint speech. Perhaps Ste. Genevieve would never really blend into the American Middle West. It was a lonely little town; there was no particular reason why progress should seek it out and alter its ways. We could imagine it still using its outlandish expressions generations from now, still keeping its Gaienné.

The Ark pushed off again, into the fast river, and just seven miles below—we may have imagined it—the faintest shiver, as if perhaps of regret, ran the length of its hull. For it was sliding through the water that covered the lost city of Kaskaskia. This at one time had been the French metropolis of the upper Louisiana territory, protected by the stone Fort Chartres; during the American Revolution, British then, it was the object of a startling, bloodless capture by bold young George Rogers Clark of Virginia; and finally it was the original capital of the State of Illinois.

There might have been a quiver of dismay as the Ark passed above that portion of the river-bottom. For

nothing was left of the city now. It was all in the river, all but one house, that of the Menard family, which had been built safe on the side of the bluff, away from the ravages of water.

Just as the river piled up land before Ste. Genevieve, year after year, it cut at the little Kaskaskia plain, below its bluff. The town was exposed to repeated devastating floods; it rallied each time in a new effort to combat the river. But there was no holding back the predatory current. Year by year the town was being eaten away before the eyes of its inhabitants.

By 1890, half the town had vanished and those who remained felt that their situation was hopeless. It would be only a matter of time before the river encroached upon their street, took their houses too. But the river was still only playing with the town. In flood two years later, it cut through to the little Okaw River, separating Kaskaskia from the mainland, making an island of what was left of the town. Few but the vagrant river-rats would live there now; the river had doomed it. And not many years later, another spring flood swept over; this time the last houses, curbstones, and lamp-posts were taken, the whole island was washed away.

Once it was the most important settlement that the French possessed above the delta, and quite properly had been defended by a sturdy fort. Like Ste. Genevieve, it had been settled by Frenchmen coming from the opposite ends of their wide American empire, and it was a thriving community when, with the rest of the northern valley between the river and the Alleghanies, it fell into the hands of the British. Then George

Rogers Clark, a red-headed boy with a band of Virginians who were looking for new land to cultivate, arrived to win its allegiance to the rebelling seaboard colonies.

Legends of fearful ravages by the "Big Knives," as they were called, had preceded these boys, through the wilderness, to the tidy little settlement at Kaskaskia. But the Virginians completed a stealthy midnight occupation of the town before a soul knew what it was all about. The Kaskaskians, next morning, were prepared to be separated, mother from son, and driven out into the wilderness without a loaf of bread or a blanket, so terrible was the reputation of the invaders. Clark astounded them by ordering that they proceed with their lives as they had in the past. His only demand was that they take the oath of allegiance to the rebelling colonies.

In their amazed relief they offered him soldiers and horses and information to help take Cahokia, a near-by fort, in the same bloodless way. And then Father Gibault proposed that instead of their marching full force upon Vincennes, as Clark was planning, the priest himself go there quietly and explain the benefits of the gentle American rule. And this, too, was done.

Thus the benevolent young diplomat won all that territory, for the time at least, without loss of life. Kaskaskia continued to prosper and possibly it might have been one of the important valley communities to-day. But you cannot reckon without the river. Kaskaskia has vanished. Its streets and houses were buried down there, under our hull somewhere.

Afternoon was lengthening the shadow the Ark threw across the water as we rode on down between Missouri and Illinois. We had been warned about the eddies; and as far as we could we were avoiding them religiously now that the water was fast and the swirling currents might be really dangerous. Now and then there was a hissing noise where the circling water struck the straight down-stream current; occasionally we saw a nest of driftwood driven round and round a sunken pivot of water; sometimes we knew them merely by the sudden ominous smoothness of the surface, for the larger eddies, unless they had caught prey of some kind, looked unnaturally quiet.

But the mate, at the wheel now, was gazing fixedly at a curious rock formation ahead and she did not think of the water. So strange were these rocks that she headed the shanty-boat straight down toward them, to get a better look. The cliff wall, rising sheer from the water, bulged in smooth round forms like tremendous confections. They made a sort of sugar-loaf fortification. The river veered off to the left of them, so that they formed a corner, sticking out at right angles from the bank. In the late sun they were coated with a rich purplish icing, altogether fabulous. She came very close, staring.

And then, suddenly! . . .

She had looked, for the first time, at the water. For one frozen instant she stared helplessly down at the base of the rocks toward which she was heading the Ark. Right out there, below our own front porch, it was boiling viciously in mad circles formed by the bulg-

ing rocks. Down in the little dark coves between, it was making a deep sullen noise.

Out, then! Head about. Clear about and up-stream again! Away from the boils, before they touched the propeller, and before they could get a hold on the hull. The Ark was capable of turning in its own length. It did so now, and for a terrible moment battled the Mississippi current. We hadn't tried that before, hadn't tried to buck the river. It held its own, though, and . . . yes . . . it seemed to be going forward, too. It was inching away from the rocks.

The mate held to the wheel until we were safe again in midstream. She had got us into danger, she must get us out again. Then, suddenly very tired, she turned the wheel over to the skipper, and we crossed, in the wake of a small ferry-boat, toward a village wharf.

The river was rushing hard past the levee here, but there was another eddy, formed by a small point of land. Now the skipper demonstrated that these things could be of some use in the world. Having headed the shanty-boat up-stream in an effort to make the turn toward shore, and having found the boat was being carried against itself, unable to overcome the power of the current here, he edged cautiously into the big swirl. And this carried us gently around toward the bank! The skipper leaped ashore with the lines and caught a "hitch."

The ferry-boat made her landing at just about the same time, and presently her pilot walked over. He was shaking his head dubiously as he watched us make fast.

"The Tower pretty near got you that time, didn't it?" he observed.

"You mean over there? Those rocks?"

"Yeah, the rocks. Grand Tower, we call 'em. That's what the town is named for—Grand Tower, Illinois. Pretty near got you, didn't they? Them eddies there by the rocks? I was watchin' you from my own boat."

"You mean those little boils up there?" The skipper straightened up, smiling broadly. "Oh, I don't know. We just headed over there to see what the rocks looked like, that was all."

We had never made a practice of getting up especially early. Ours was a dilatory migration, at best, for time was no longer of the least importance. Life was easy. We had surrendered ourselves to the river and the weather, and we had to adapt ourselves to them, but this was our only regimen. Some care, some caution and forethought these demanded of us, but when they had been given their due we had no other cares. There was no hurry.

Just before we turned in, though, we saw something that stiffened our backs a little. In the sharp village dusk the skipper had stopped still in the road and looked down at his feet. There was a film of ice on a puddle. He kicked it gently and broke through. Then we walked silently back to the shanty-boat. Nothing in particular was said about it, but somehow both of us woke up early in the morning and it took a remarkably short time to get through breakfast. We didn't want our ropes to freeze up. Frozen ropes, we had heard, had a tendency to snap under strain. We didn't want to have to use a hatchet on the water-supply. But winter

was at our heels; there was the hint on the mud puddle. And there had been a touch of sharpness these last nights.

So we moved off very early into the stream. It was a hazy morning and before we had run a mile the mists had thickened about us. First we could see the Missouri hills rising above the soft white cloud that hung on the river, and then we too moved inevitably into the cloud and we could see nothing at all.

Suppose we heard a steamboat approaching through the fog. We had no horn; nothing but the old automobile claxon that Clarkson had given us when we started. Small chance of a steamboat pilot paying any attention to its protests, even if he did by some chance happen to hear it! Of course we could shout. . . . And there was no means of knowing which way to go. Perhaps more eddies were lying in wait at the feet of more strange rock formations.

The skipper headed cautiously over in the direction where he thought Missouri ought to be and gradually we saw the dim dark forms of trees. Then he let down the anchor and we waited. It was the one and only morning when we had tried to make an early start. Fog was our reward. We'd have to sit here now until the sun burned it up. The mate perched a little nervously on deck with the field-glass to her eyes, trying in vain to pierce the mists for a possible approaching steamboat. Close behind her stood the megaphone, with which to simulate a fog-horn in such an eventuality.

Presently the dense moist air about us grew faintly luminous, and then more and more so, until we sat in a pool of blinding light. There was a rift, finally, and

the sun beamed through. The skipper lost no time starting the motor and hauling in the anchor, and we moved on, a little dubiously at first, through the vague gleaming mist. As we went along we watched it grow more and more tenuous. Thinner and silkier, it drifted away. The sun had done the work.

For hours sunlight shimmered on the river before our eyes, until at noon we paused under the shadow of a big paddle-wheel at the town of Cape Girardeau. The wheel belonged to the steamer we had seen loading at St. Louis. Taking another cargo now, she was making ready to leave for the city again in the morning.

Up the hill was a town where people answered our questions in soft lazy sentences that prompted us to ask more and more, just to hear the answers. We hardly knew what we were saying or what they told us in reply, for we were listening to the way they drew out their vowels and blurred their consonants. Their voices told us that we were getting down toward the fringe of the South. The morning had been cold enough, but now the sun shone bright and here we were coming to another country, where the land and the houses and the people were different.

Certainly it was not the Middle West. Overlooking the water, just beyond the wharf, tremendous old brick residences spread themselves. Some of them, of course, were deserted and empty now, their gardens run to weeds and hay where their lawns had been; for they were built for a roomier day. But a number of them were in spick-and-span order, newly painted and fresh, with crisp curtains at the windows. A holly bush flung out its glossy leaves in one back yard; in another we

saw our first magnolia. Streets of such houses and gardens wandered along, vaguely accommodating themselves to the curve of the water-front and the slope of the hills behind. Perhaps Cape Girardeau had been for many generations a prosperous small city, where people did as they pleased.

After so much idle, unpretentious comfort, the main street came as a gentle shock. For it might have turned up in Hollywood—or anywhere else, for that matter. Most of the buildings had adopted the new, obvious Spanish style of architecture popular for villas and drug-stores in city subdivisions. Old buildings had been dressed up with stucco and tile. New ones, starting at scratch, had done a more thorough job. They were all square-topped, with arched doorways and generous belts of garish tile. But it was not long before this phenomenon explained itself, and it had a certain propriety. A tablet on one of the brightest of the buildings informed us that on this site Spain had built its first fort west of the Mississippi. We were still in the old Spanish Dominion. And the modern town, according to its lights, was adapting that heritage to its present requirements.

We couldn't help wondering with some misgiving what would come next. Apparently nothing at all was static. Communities were slowly transmuted by changing circumstances, generation after generation, and the country was still in flux. There was a French layer here first, then a Spanish, and a French again, before the United States, and to each the little town had lent itself. The people, with their ideas and their styles of architecture, had made the changes that seemed right

They gave us tracts

and necessary at the time. Now the bigger towns, like this one—the ones that were important enough to be in touch with others in New Mexico and Oregon and Delaware—had begun to merge into one typical community. Even the individualistic sense of its Spanish background was expressed tritely in Cape Girardeau, with colored tiles, on the business street if not in the leisurely homes. It was beginning to move now, distinct and egocentric though it had once been, toward the level where people thought and looked alike.

The town dropped out of sight as the Ark rounded the Cape, but it was not so easy to lose the vague restless sense of its contradictions. We could not imagine that this last stage would be final, or that the United States might be actually jelling—it would amount to that. There had been so much change in the past two or three hundred years, surely the process couldn't stop now. Society must be fluid still. But there was no knowing what would come next.

Speculation had to give way, though, to the more immediate question of navigation as the water ruffled up by and by. The river was still high, for the crest of the rise had not yet caught up with the shanty-boat, and so there was still some danger from the current. We were being borne gradually closer to the mouth of the Ohio River now, and we had been warned to look there for boils that sounded fairly fabulous.

Sundown found us just heading down under a slim high bridge above the mouth of the new river. But, keeping steadily to midstream, we saw none of the renowned eddies and we proceeded indifferently along. The town of Cairo would be two miles up the Ohio and

as we swung down toward the broad mouth we debated turning in there. But in our small way we had become speed maniacs since the flood. And besides, Kentucky would be just below and we longed to set foot in Kentucky. There had been so much of Illinois, weeks of it, and we were tired of seeing it always on our left. And so we thought we'd pass up Cairo. When we skimmed into the combined waters of the two rivers the Ark took on a pace that was as delightful as it was startling, and we fairly hummed along to the village of Hickman, in Kentucky. This was the South!

And it was, for we could hardly understand what the children on the water-front were saying to us. We had to ask them to repeat slowly, as though we had arrived in a foreign country whose language we had learned out of a book. It was wonderful! We went to bed content.

A sharp sound, of something striking the front porch, waked us early. A roll of papers—red, green, and pink—was lying out there. The screen door stood open. And then we saw that another boat was coming to mooring beside our own. To our half-wakened eyes it was an amazing apparition. It said, in tall red letters athwart the bow:

ONLY JESUS SAVES

Port side and starboard, it commanded:

GET RIGHT WITH GOD

Its name, apparently, was:

MARANATHA (The Lord Cometh)

And in every other available space it said:

BIBLES

It was altogether a startling visitation, so early in the morning.

Then a healthy-looking freckle-faced lad came out of the cabin and stood well up forward with a line, ready to jump ashore. He looked like any other little boy who was used to boats. An older face was dimly visible inside, at the tiller.

Well, it was to them, apparently, that we owed the literature on the porch. They must have hurled it at the door in passing. The skipper opened, and read:

PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD

All mankind are born in sin. The ONLY WAY to escape this condemnation and wrath is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Your own goodness and morality will not save you. If you do not repent of your sins and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation, you are lost, FOREVER LOST.

There were half a dozen other tracts, each in a different color, each with its threatening message for the sinner. Sometimes the text was illustrated with a horrible example, supplied from the confession of a particular sinner whose name was withheld. The skipper had begun to read one of these when the boat lurched gently to starboard. We had á visitor, and a sturdy one at that. We hastened to invite him in.

The river evangelist proved to be a genial soul, hale and loud-spoken, whose face broke easily into an engaging smile. He seemed not a whit depressed by the dire messages he was bearing along the river banks. No doubt his conscience was serene.

He was on his way down the river now from the Ohio Valley, where he had spent the summer and autumn. Souls of the deep South received his ministrations in the wintertime, of the middle North in the warmer weather. So he and his boy traveled up and down the Mississippi and its tributaries, spreading the word of God. This was conveyed, as we had seen, by means of colored leaflets, tightly rolled and bound so that they would be handy to throw from the boat. Sometimes he could not take time to make a personal visit at an isolated cluster of shanties; then he would scatter the printed word along the bank as he passed by. But more often he stopped and talked; and when he made conversions he baptized in the stream, then and there.

Thus he kept in touch with communities that could not be reached by the railroad or by automobile, settlements where mail came rarely and there was little or nothing to read. Into colorless lives he would suddenly make his entrance, with his vivid leaflets, and the people read or heard the ominous message. If they had any money they would sometimes buy a Bible for the community and keep the flame of his ministry alive after he had gone. He had an agency for the sale of Bibles and it made a profitable side-line. His steady income came, however, from a missionary society. He did fairly well.

He seemed to enjoy talking about himself and his occupation; he fairly expanded as he went on. For he was one of those healthy, likable people who can't help being satisfied with themselves and whatever they happen to be doing.

There seemed to be only one cloud on his horizon, and that was the State of Louisiana. Down there, he told us, the people were going to perdition and they liked it. New Orleans was to blame, of course, with its foreign influence. A city of many vices, dancing straight into the fires of hell, it was a burden to him, and in a sense he had to gird himself up each autumn for the tribulations of winter in the Southern bayous.

Although we did not need another Bible and we were not ready subjects for conversion, the itinerant preacher seemed to enjoy his visit and he promised that he would be looking for us along the New Orleans levee later on. He would be there before us.

When he had gone we sat still for a while, considering what he had told us of Louisiana. To the migratory farmer, the other evening, it had meant something a little different. We were growing curious. And we were wondering whether or not the shanty-boat would see us safely down there, to the city of deplorable gaiety.

Chapter XVIII

TOUGH TOWNS

New Madrid tall cranes were lifting logs out of the water and piling them along the bank. The town itself was almost invisible behind a high flood dike of mud, a levee of the South, and only the roofs showed. We were tied up in a snug slough, near a barrel-stave mill, and the wind and rain kept us there all day.

The foreman of the mill came down and told us of his adventures during the great flood of 1927, when the town was almost wiped out. He and a handful of men alone remained as the water engulfed it; and each morning they climbed out through their windows, into skiffs, to help the government crews guard the levees.

"See that long shed yonder?" he said. "Well, it used to be twice the size. When we saw the water was bound to come over, we knew it would take some of the shed with it. But we figured it might only take half if we were careful. So we sawed it in two. It might have wrecked the whole building if we hadn't done that. It wrecked a sight of others."

The town behind the levee looked as if the great flood had left it permanently depressed, as if it might never recover. Many of the stores were empty and there was a half-hearted air about the way those that

remained did business. But the people were interesting, for in this lower end of Missouri there was a feeling not of the South but of the Southwest. There were hill billies in boots and sweaters and broad felt hats; but there were Mexicans, too, Indians, and an occasional Chinese. It was a tough town. It seemed as if the high water had cleared away all the tenderfoots and left it to the hard-bitten souls who didn't give a damn whether the water came in again or not. That was the way they looked.

Fog kept us at Caruthersville for a day and that day happened to be Thanksgiving. We walked up to the main street of another tough town, very like the last, and there we stocked up with sweet potatoes, celery, cranberries, and roast. We even managed to find some fresh milk—one of the greatest rarities, of course, in rural communities.

The same fog kept the *Valley Queen,* a packet of the Robert E. Lee Line out of Memphis, tied up just below us. She had brought a load of canned milk and vegetables, cane chairs, stovepipe and bed-springs to the villages along the river, and she was getting ready now to carry a drove of Caruthersville mules down to the city market. But the river was invisible in the mist, and she waited by the wharf. That was how we happened to meet Captain Holman, a pilot of thirty years' standing, skipper of the *Queen,* and a deep-dyed pessimist.

"Packet-boats is antiques now," he drawled morosely. He spat over the rail. "And that means that a packet pilot is an antique, too. But I reckon it's what I'll be so long as there's any runnin' at all. The river's

my trade and I'm too old to learn any new tricks. Well, I kinda like the river, anyhow, I reckon."

The upper layers of fog cleared toward late afternoon; and from his high pilot-house on top of the steamboat, we could see over the soft blanket that smothered the water, to the shores beyond. So it was safe to back the *Queen* out with her load of mules. But the Ark lay over until morning.

It was clear then and something else had happened. A large bulletin-board surmounting the levee recorded the stage of the river, for the benefit of passing steamboats. Last night it had read "35¾ R." That meant that the water had risen so many feet above an arbitrary low-water mark by that time. But now it had been altered. This morning we saw "35¼ F." The river was beginning to fall again; it had gone down six inches since dark. The crest of the rise had passed us in the night.

This was our last port in Missouri; Kentucky also was gone, and the shanty-boat began to jockey between Arkansas and Tennessee. Taking turns at the wheel, we proceeded at a lazy pace, stopping where it looked interesting, meandering along down the great bends as we felt like it. Miles of the flattening South country slipped by our windows, miles of soft reddish willow banks and yellow fields. Once a white-pillared house stood pleasantly close to the shore and children were playing in the yard. They stopped and stared when we came along, and then shouted as we ran close. Sometimes the river narrowed to a small lobe with dark marshy banks and a lonely house stood under the trees. If the family were at home they would come out to

see what we were, and stand gazing after us until we rounded the bend. A shanty-boat with a motor tacked astern was still a marvel. Then for hours again there were no houses at all, and no sign of human life in the country sliding by.

The brilliant sunny noon passed and the skipper loaded up the engine with another round of gasoline. Then he noticed that the supply in the cans was running low. We consulted the light-list and headed prudently toward a village that should be two miles down on our left.

There was not much to show whether it was the village or not. The country rolled gently away from the river, in the sunlight, and a soft deep road disappeared behind a knoll. Perhaps there were houses back there, and a store where gasoline was sold; there was no telling. But we did see a small landing where a rickety barge was tied up, with a motor-boat lashed alongside. That might be a ferry; but whatever it was, it burned gasoline.

Two men appeared from behind the hill and walked down to see us tie up at the pier. Hands in pockets, they stood waiting. One of them, the older, looked at us with smoldering eyes and a somber set mouth.

We asked if this were the village.

"Naw," said the older man. He spoke from the corner of his mouth; he almost spat the word.

We were somewhat puzzled.

"Naw," he went on, "it's down-river. A good two mile down-river. You run through the chute and you'll find it."

We hesitated a moment. But whether it was actually

our village or not didn't matter. The motor-boat used gasoline and there must be some available here. The skipper prepared to tie.

"You go on down," said the man. "You'll find it."

But now his companion stepped forward.

"You're all right, Cap. Town's right over yonder behind the hill. Follow the road yonder."

The other man smiled.

It was a joke, was it? Well, we smiled, too. But we had an obscure feeling that for some reason the man hadn't wanted us to land at all. He didn't want us coming in here. He didn't want any strangers coming in, perhaps. Certainly it was a lonely little place. There couldn't have been many interruptions to its peace.

He stood studying our boat while the skipper talked with his young companion, who turned out to be the ferry pilot. That little old barge out there with the gas-boat hitched to it was the ferry. He didn't have any schedule, he just ran across whenever there was a call for it; and he had to hang around here by the river the livelong day, in case some folks should come down the road and ask for a lift over, or in case an automobile blew its horn for him from the Arkansas side. He bought his gas at the village store, about three quarters of a mile back in the hills. It would be a long way for the skipper to carry gas, but the storekeeper had to come down, later, to change the river-gage bulletin —that was his job—and maybe he would run the cans down for us at the same time.

The other man now looked across at the skipper.

"Followin' the river?" he asked, hitching a shoulder toward the Ark.

"Yes."

"Where y'all come from?"

"From the upper river."

"How far down you goin'?"

"All the way, I guess."

"All the way, hn!" He seemed to consider this for a moment. Then he said, "What's the idea?"

"Oh, we like it, that's all," said the skipper.

The man turned on his heel. Over his shoulder he asked:

"Got a match?"

He poured the last grains from a tobacco-bag into two papers. Then he and the ferry pilot stretched themselves out on the levee in the full sunshine, and lighted up, as if life were just one long dreamy siesta for them.

We walked down the worn road with our empty cans, enjoying the sun, ourselves, for the day was warm, as warm as it had ever been since we left Wisconsin's Indian summer. Looking across the russety hills that sloped through soft light and shadow, we thought this might be a pleasant place to live. If the sky were always as blue, and the hills as vivid; and if there were often a song-sparrow, like this one, whistling his far sharp tune somewhere just at the verge of our hearing.

A turn in the road brought us to a small whitewashed shack where a pig nosed at a bush in the front yard. Then there was another house, and gradually a few more, casually scattered along the hillside. Hardly a village, it was more like a cluster of tiny farms, a simple rural settlement where people apparently pro-

duced nearly everything they used. There couldn't be much trading here.

Indeed, we found the store locked up. But a man with a fat babyish face came out of the next house, staring uncertainly at the strangers for a moment. Then he strolled over to find out what we wanted. He filled our cans from a barrel in the barn, painfully measuring, in a rusty quart measure, nine gallons of gasoline and one of oil. It took a long time, but there was no use trying to speed the process; and on such an afternoon there was no need for haste. This was the way it was done, and the way it had always been done, no doubt. By the same laborious means he probably ladled his gasoline into the automobile tanks of the community, if there was another machine besides his own.

He undertook to deliver our cans for us and to carry us down to the boat. But we were in no mood to hurry now. We preferred to walk down the road again. Sunlight shimmered across the hills, down on the little low roofs, and we were satisfied. We were going to like the South. It was warm and it seemed to have the habit of taking life easily.

Sauntering along, we were almost forgetting the dubious reception we had had at the river-front. But now, as we approached the levee, we saw the two men again, still stretched full-length in the sunlight.

We paused, and the skipper offered cigarettes, ready-made cigarettes, out of a package. Even the sullen man who had tried to turn us away seemed a little mellowed after his half-hour in the sun. Possibly he had been looking in the shanty-boat windows while we were

gone, and had decided it looked harmless. Whatever it was he had feared, he seemed to be easier about us now. He turned over on his elbow, and told us he had a cabin boat, too. He kept it moored in a pocket just below. We wouldn't see it, though, even if we did pass close, because the trees hid it from the river. He rowed. Yes, he was following the river, same as we. He'd come down the Ohio, from Cincinnati.

The skipper asked how long he had been on the way. He stared across the river for a moment. Then he said, deliberately:

"I reckon it's been about two years."

"It takes that long to row, does it?"

"Well, yes." Then he raised his shoulder and narrowed his eyes at the skipper. "That is, I lost some time, of course. I dropped a year, along in Indiana. But I like it here, and I dunno as I'll ever git to Memphis. Me and the pilot has a good old time these days. You can't tell, though; I may pull out to-morrow. Can't ever tell."

Then he stretched out flat again and crooked his elbow over his eyes. He did not move when we turned to go, he didn't look up. He seemed to be entirely indifferent. The ferry pilot walked down to the landing with us and helped loosen the lines, and as he waited for us to push off he stood shading his eyes from the sun. Then he glanced back at the levee, but the man there had not appeared to move.

"Queer bird, that guy," he confided to the skipper. He waited a moment. Then he edged over closer. "I sometimes think maybe there's somethin' shady about him. But I reckon it's no concern o' mine, at that. He's

been here above a month now. He's got a little money and it's none o' my affair where he got it from. Folks around here don't like him much. Not so much. But I gotta set around here, along the levee, all day long, in case somebody wants to cross, and I got nothin' to do. Neither has he. Nothin' happens here; there's no trains and the road's so bad there's hardly ever any cars come through. Just the *Valley Queen* puts in here about once a month, with the groceries. So we loaf around here on the levee together. And I reckon I don't care where he comes from, or why he's got his cabin boat tucked away down below there in the pocket."

We watched sharp, the next half-mile or so, for a pocket below the landing, but there was no sign of it or of any boat. The bank was heavily wooded and trees were crisscrossed over the water's edge. If the river curved into the darkness there, it would be a good place to hide. If one were running away from something, this would be the place. And nothing ever happened here—except once, when some strangers in a traveling shanty-boat stopped for gas and went right on again. . . . No, we didn't think it likely that anybody would find him here, whatever he was.

Chapter XIX

WEARY BARR

WATER and winter willows stretched cold and brown a long way before us. It had been the same all day. For the sky was overcast, the wind was raw, and the water sullen. It was a moody river valley, down here; to-day we were in sterile, inhospitable country, no place for people to be. It might be all very well to pass along through in your self-sufficient little houseboat, with its pictures on the walls and an open book turned down on the table; just to skim the surface of it, and perhaps make some speculative remark on the desolate fringes of Arkansas and Tennessee. If you minded your business more or less, like that, you could pass along.

Others had done it. In the old times thousands of strangers, packed away in white steamboats bound for such glamorous legends as St. Louis or New Orleans, had passed up and down, glancing over the rails now and then at this place. But of course there was nothing here for them to look at. "The lower river is monotonous," some one said. "Just a bend and a bar, that's all; a bar and a bend." So the steamboat pushed around the bar, leaving no mark here—except, perhaps, for some permanent change in the mind of the small boy who was standing up on the levee till her

stacks were out of sight. And this place looked blank again. Yes, it was all very well to go on.

But lend yourself to this country, and you'd see. Make yourself a part of it, by trying to get your living; bring children into this world here, for example, and it would have you.

That was the way it felt as we skimmed along. We ended by turning in to shore at last, to see what it was all about. There was nothing much to show. For one thing, winter seemed here to have a slipshod way of coming. Frosty Northerners, we were accustomed to a dramatic entrance. Late November stung your skin, etched branches against a remote sky from which the sun glittered hostilely, then disappeared, and the world whitened overnight. Here it seemed the land merely died; it stiffened and went brown for a season.

It was a treacherously slippery mud bank and we had to reach and pull ourselves along by branches. What made it more difficult were snarls of tough black vines, dead now, underfoot, and burrs and thistles. Occasionally we saw a huge ball of tumbleweed caught on a shrub, another rolling in a breeze to ambush somewhere else. We came to the top of the bank and stood up high on a fallen tree, to look around. There was a little path, and it led to a cleared place. It led to a field of stubble. Some wretch was trying to get a living here, then. We walked along over the soft mud, stepping around rank grass and weeds, to the track, to the opening. Still it was a brown world. The little cabin was almost indistinguishable from the trees behind it, from the rotten sagged picket fence in front of it. The fence inclosed a patch of low sickly cotton.

He was rowing down

Coming nearer, we saw that the cabin also was rotting. The boards had been set vertical to the floor, but the rain and wind of years had worn them away, so that now they were pointed, like pickets, at the bottom. You could see inside, through the gaps, to a vague commotion on the floor, where some children were scrambling. You couldn't see in at the windows, because instead of glass there were rags draped over the openings.

But some one was out in the yard. A red-haired young woman was washing out clothes over a tub beside the stoop, and a little girl sat next to her, on the bare ground. When we came along, close to the fence, the child gaped at us for one electric instant of terror and then flung herself into the house. The mother looked up from her wash. And in her face, too, there was a swift flicker of alarm—quickly masked, though, and supplanted by a tentative smile. *Strangers did not come here.* And we two had appeared very silently from the woods.

We hastened to explain that we had a boat on the river, a small boat, tied up just above, around the bar. It was there now. We came up here to . . . well, was there a store near by, anywhere? Where we could get a loaf of bread?

Well, now we were related to something in the known world, something permanent and commonplace. The river. The river had brought us down and by some chance—it had never occurred before—dropped us here where she lived. So, then, we had relation, a kind of reality, and suspicion gradually gave way before the glow of having some one new to talk to.

As her face brightened you could have said she was pretty. At least the possibility of her being pretty, if there were warmth and care and fewer worries, was quite clear in her live eyes, her evenly formed face, and her bright hair. The fact, too, that she was young, really young, came as a revelation. In another life she might have hardened into selling tickets in a glass case before a movie house. In another she might have welcomed guests—many, many guests—into a pleasant home. Here she was, instead, where the only new thing was a new child coming into the world, more clothes to wash and mend, more beans to cook. And now a couple of strangers from the North, stopping on their way down-river. (For how many years had the river gone by without bringing anything but the driftwood?)

Yes, there was a store. You went behind the house, past her cow grazing, opened the gate, and walked down the track. It would be the second cabin on the left. But . . . what was it we wanted to buy? Bread. Well, now . . .

She seemed a little embarrassed.

Well, you see, around down this way, people 'most always did their own bakin'. But—she wanted us to be suited!—they would have soda crackers, perhaps, at the store. Sometimes they got some in. She hadn't heard, yet, whether Stover brought any back this last time he went down to town. It was only a few days ago. . . .

We thanked her, and promised to stop again on our way back. So she stood and watched us go, and her arms, reddened by cold and work, rested by her sides.

Her head was held up. Something was happening today.

We walked around, past a ladder that led up to a window in the loft, where some of the children probably slept, and toward the gate. The cow stood firm and would not let us pass. She looked and she seemed to feel very much a part of this country. For she was dun-colored and poor, her sharp hip-bones reaching up under a thin cover of skin and hair, her eyes totally expressionless. The lower flanks, the belly, and the tail were hopelessly matted with burrs. So, we felt sure, it would be until the day of death.

The skipper pushed her from the gate, and, still in the same stupor, she shambled over, just so far as the impetus of his hand impelled her and no farther. We went out to the mud track. Now the poor little clearing lay before us. Perhaps you could call it a community; it was a sprinkling of wretched dwellings where people somehow seemed to exist. A little below them a great sand-bar stretched out to the eternal river; not far enough below, however, to spare them from the spring floods. There were watermarks on most of the cabins. Where did the people go when the mud and water, discoloring the unpainted outside boards of their shacks, flowed in? Well, some of them had lofts. Each little cabin had its patch of cotton or an acre of stubble, each was as abject and as barren as the first.

One of these was to be the store. We hesitated, for the door was closed and it was just a cabin like the others, only that it was built a little higher off the ground; it had no windows at all. Then a great blood-

hound lumbered past us, up the steps, and pushed the door open. People were standing in there. We followed the hound.

Some one shut the door behind us and now the only light came through the cracks in the floor and in the walls and through an open space in one of the gables. Wind came through the same places, the damp, clinging wind of a Southern winter. The shadowy people, standing in the half-darkness here, did not pay much attention to us; we had time to look around. Behind the counter were four or five shelves and they contained canned and dried goods. A whole row of cane-syrup, some beans, some tomatoes, dried peaches, and more syrup. On the floor there were sacks from which now and then the woman who kept the store would level up a scoop of meal, corn-meal, the staple of poor whites. We saw no other supplies, except for a large open keg that stood in front of the counter. This was filled with a dark, sour-smelling liquid in which unrecognizable objects floated. And this, apparently, was the only thing in the place worth while to the hound which had entered before us, and to another larger one that lifted itself up out of a corner now. The two beasts sniffed and whined about the barrel.

The woman cursed them, but they wheeled about the barrel closer than before and one of them began to howl. She came around the counter, dipped one of her knotted hands into the barrel, brought up a sausage and some wisps of kraut, down again and found another. These she flung across the floor, toward the corner.

"There y'are, and now leave be."

The dogs leaped to the meat as she turned back to her customers. A spindle-legged albino girl, a whiskered old man in hip boots, an anxious motherly woman with a red sweater pinned close about her throat took their meal and syrup and their bags of salt and, with furtive glances in our direction, went off. Now it was our turn, but as the storekeeper looked us over, her hands, so lately in the vinegar, flattened on the counter, we had to brace ourselves. If ever we had wanted to buy food, it was a long time ago. The idea of eating was remote, dead; it had never existed.

We took a small can of tomatoes away with us, down the rickety steps, and outside where the wind blew fresh over the harsh land. So we wandered along the mud track, stepping wide over puddles, now and then skirting the weeds where the whole road was swamped in water. A mule splashed sullenly by, ankle-deep, his tail and his coat, like the cow's, a dingy mass of burrs. A few were in his ears. Nobody would ever take them out; it was impossible. There they would be until they rotted, if burrs rot. On his back a black-eyed boy was staring openly at us, turning to see more when he had gone by.

"Howdy," said the skipper.

"Evenin'," said the lad, his stare unchanging.

The road went nowhere in particular; or, rather, it went anywhere. It swung wide of a thick cottonwood, it elbowed obligingly out of the way of a listless house and yard. It divided, met, branched wide, shambled lazily along. It had little purpose and no apparent destination. Still, it was this road that must be, somehow, the link between here and the world. Even this sprink-

ling of dismal lives was in touch—by means of a can of syrup, a postage-stamp—with the world we knew, wherever that might be. If you followed long enough, perhaps at last you would come to a place where everything was as usual, where there were chain-store fronts and Hollywood names for household words.

Meanwhile it was taking us past dark dwellings. . . . People may be so hopelessly flattened by circumstance that nothing is any longer worth the effort of resistance. Cotton is devoured by worms, corn is swamped by torrential rains and its roots rot. The unflagging sun of endless summers, the hurricanes of Septembers, the damp dun-colored winters eat into a man's soul. His heritage, a moment when Pithecanthropus tried standing erect, is sunk and it is no longer worth while to try to save himself or his wife or his children. He and they are alive only because it is not yet time to die.

This is why there were houses here with their roofs caved in and families living in them. And a house that was ready to fall over but had been propped—not erect, but at an angle of sixty degrees—by two haphazard poles, and a family living in there, too. They did not always answer our greetings as we walked by. They looked from their sagging stoops and let the strangers pass.

We turned back soon, and evening was darkening as we again passed the house where the red-haired woman lived. She came out, half eager and half shy; and we, somehow, were tremendously glad to see her. For here, after all, was a spark of vivacity. Heaven knew where it came from, how it outlived the monot-

onous irony of child after child, and a dank succession of salt-pork suppers. Well, she was glad to see us.

Of course the place had a name, she said; this was Barr, Tennessee. Called, she had heard, for a family that once owned the place. In the old times, before the war between the States, it was a good plantation. The family, though—the Barrs—didn't come back afterward, that was all, and one by one others had drifted in. So they lived here. If you had a mule you might sometimes take a day off to go to town. Well, it would be better than twenty miles through the woods. Steamboat? No, they never landed here. The river had thrown up the sand-bar since the plantation days, cut them off. Climb upon the levee some days, though, and you could catch a sight of the *Queen* passing by, once a month or so. She kind of liked the river, except in high water; some day maybe she'd catch the *Queen* at a landing below here and go on down to Memphis. She'd like to see Memphis. . . .

We walked slowly back to the boat, but we did not go inside. It was enough to glance through the window and see that the stove was still glowing quietly, that it was fresh in there, and comfortable; it was home. For a long time we sat silent on the deck and we did not mind that the air was raw. We had stumbled to-day across lives that were hopeless beyond anything we had ever imagined before; lives that were utterly stagnant. And now we knew what some of those dull unbroken stretches of river bank hid.

The sun sank slowly opposite Barr, Tennessee, and it was good to be back with the river again. We went inside and lighted the lamp.

Chapter XX

THE FOOT OF BEALE STREET

A FISHERMAN, some miles above Memphis, drew the skipper aside and, with a careful glance to make sure that the mate was at a safe distance, spoke softly of the big doings on Mud Island, just opposite the city. Everybody on the river, he said—everybody within miles that owned a boat or could get one—managed to drop in there some time or other during the year, to have himself a time. And what you couldn't get there, you couldn't get anywhere. Yes, sir, it was plain and fancy vice, that was what it was; and what went on there was nobody's business.

You might not believe it to look at the place, he warned the skipper, but it had the stuff if you knew your way about. It was nothing, really, but a big mud-flat formed when the river took a notion to head off toward Arkansas, away from Memphis, leaving only the trickle of the Wolf River to run down its old channel past the wharf. The island was a jungle of willows between. And they sure knew how to raise the Old Nick there.

The skipper promised not to miss anything. The reputation of Memphis was growing more and more alluring, and confused as well. It would be the first sizable city that was definitely Southern, and once it

had been the pivot of a struggle between Union and Confederate armies. But somewhere running down to its wharf would be Beale Street, the negro thoroughfare where jazz was born. And now there was to be a glamorous Mud Island, a Barbary Coast of the Mississippi, if the fisherman was sober when he talked with the skipper.

For any lesser assortment of charms, we should have bowed to the wind, hunted up a sheltered cove, and let the river go by until to-morrow. For the water was ruffling up into jerky little waves and an incipient cross-current gale was pushing insistently at the cabin. But we had to see Memphis, and so we held on. A government towboat with two barges shoved close by us and left us floundering in its wake. Just at that moment, however, we were rounding a bend and now we could look across at a distant cluster of silhouettes on the sky. They were sky-scrapers! We could hold on.

The shanty-boat had to run down below some of the sky-scrapers, along the outer edge of Mud Island, first. We were looking eagerly behind every willow clump, for a dance-hall, but nothing stirred in there. Then we rounded the point of the island and bucked up the sluggish current of the Wolf River, toward the levee. This side of the mud-flat looked no more promising than the other had. A number of shanty-boats—sloppy, tatterdemalion shanty-boats—were moored to the flooded willows along the edge, and at intervals the partly submerged hull of a derelict steamboat reached out of the river. Muddy high-water marks showed on the trunks of the willows, fairly far up, and the skip-

per decided that if there was a Barbary Coast there, it must have to be rebuilt after each spring rise.

A large ferry-boat was backing out just behind us, and a number of towboats confused the channel ahead. The Ark, running against the Wolf River current, was not making very good time, and would hardly have been safe in an argument with any of these purposeful craft. We were grateful to nose in at the lower end of the cobblestone wharf.

Memphis, just lighting its street lamps, was high on a bluff above us. Down here in the dusk was a separate world. Two fish-markets floated on barges alongside us; on their decks stood barrels of flapping Buffalo, goo, and cat. A little farther down was the wharf where the *Kate Adams*, one of the fastest packets of steamboat days, had burned to her water-line. The *Valley Queen* was due to tie there soon. Government boats, fish-boats, and pleasure craft were threading in and out.

Mud stretched along above the cobblestone levee, and beyond it a stone wall flanked the bluff. Just under the wall, along the strip of mud, there were a few smoldering bonfires. We passed close by one of them and looked at negroes clustered about the red coals. They had their collars turned up and one was wearing a fat muffler wrapped around his neck and tied in a huge bow under his chin. Another had on ear-laps. You would have thought a blizzard was in progress. They were not saying much of anything, only shuffling moodily around the fire. Perhaps they were waiting around on the chance of a job, loading freight on one of the boats.

We walked up off the levee, and there we saw a street sign. It said, "Beale Avenue." So the Ark had unconsciously turned its nose square in at the foot of Beale Street—which had, however, mysteriously become an avenue.

Downtown, Memphis was alive with red and green street lamps, the shop windows were bright with tinsel, Teddy-bears and mamma-dolls, Roman candles and fire-crackers. Christmas was coming!

We really hadn't any shopping to do, and until we did a little banking in the morning we shouldn't have much of anything to do it with, but the windows exerted a powerful influence over the mate, so we pushed at one door. It wouldn't open. Oh well, maybe it was Sunday. And anyway, we hadn't gone to the movies in ever so long, and that would be more fun than walking down the aisles of a department-store when you weren't buying anything. But the movies, with all their alluring billboards, closed us out too. There wasn't a sign of life in any of them. Memphis was a Sunday-closing town.

At last we found out what the younger generation did about it and we felt entirely satisfied with the arrangement. They were all dancing, over at the new hotel. A dinner dance was held there every Sunday evening, to meet the predicament, it appeared. And so the young people, unable to indulge a vicious tendency to look at motion pictures, danced instead. We did, too. And between dances we had oysters Rockefeller, alligator-pear, hot bread, and black, black coffee.

Later we wandered out to investigate the farther, duskier reaches of Beale Street, and there we sauntered along through a dark dressed-up crowd of whist-

ling, laughing men and women, past hair-tonic signs and [illegible]. We lingered at the edge of a [illegible] in an alleyway, and looked up [illegible] startling in a white sheet, war-[illegible] cheeks, a crest of feathers [illegible] waved a brown bottle above [illegible] that one dessert-spoonful of its [illegible] of our internal disturbances. [illegible] the Beale Street Palace. [illegible] Barrasso, the manager, gave [illegible] and we looked through his [illegible] after another now famous on [illegible] own in Harlem, was scrawled [illegible] was proud of his theater. He boasted of having launched the careers of more than a dozen negro actors, singers, and dancers, at his Wednesday-night amateur performances.

He had just lost another promising pair. They didn't amount to much yet, but with a little coaching they'd be hoofing it with the best. Well, it was all milk and honey where they were now. He told us that King Vidor of the movies had been in town a little while before, taking some river shots for a new film. Like others in the profession, Vidor had a habit of dropping around to have a look at the Palace bill whenever he came through. He found nothing in the performance this time to attract his interest, but afterward in the lobby, as the audience came out, he discovered Two Bits and Half Pint doing their stuff for nickels and dimes. Two Bits strutted and stamped to Half Pint's moans and clapping hands. Vidor watched and made

inquiries, and the magic hand of Hollywood reached out for Half Pint and Two Bits. Barrasso looked wistful; another act had gone the way of milk and honey.

"Well, the show business!" said the impresario of Beale Street. "That's the way of it. But I reckon I got no kick. Bessie Smith's billed here for week after next. She was one of our gals, and she's faithful. We see her down here once a year, anyway. And the population sure does give her a hand when she hits the town. Well, I suppose that's the way it'll go with the pickaninnies. They'll be comin' back here, some day, to do a week now and then. They all come back."

The first thing to do in the morning was to hunt up a bank. But it seemed that numerous failures more numerous embezzlements had made the nerves unusually jumpy. A draft and a postal y-order turned into futile scraps of paper unc eir noses. A battery of paper identifications wer th-less. If we had been born in the town and ha e endorsement of a sufficient number of propert olders and had at an early age been held on the k of the assistant-cashier, then possibly we might have cashed a small check. But we were unknown, and therefore obviously we were suspicious characters.

Well, we were not entirely broke, and perhaps there would be a more friendly village down-stream. We could wait. Our calculations, however, were upset when we returned to the boat and found seated upon the porch a precise old gentleman who announced that he was the wharf-master and as such it was his business

to see that all craft tied up along the levee paid a wharfage fee. If we didn't like it, we could go over to Mud Island, with the other shanty-boats. But we didn't think we'd enjoy staying over on Mud Island. For an evening's visit, perhaps, but . . . The best arguments—no other city along the river charged such a fee—came to nothing. We paid from a painfully dwindling bank roll.

It began to look as if the hospitality of the South were only a legend propagated to ensnare innocent Northerners. Once they got you down here, they closed their theaters in your face if it happened to be Sunday, they wouldn't honor your drafts on Monday or any other day, and now they were charging you something just for the privilege of being here, exposed to their harsh ways.

Perhaps we might have gone away feeling like that. But as it happened, the mate's watch needed a crystal and we dropped in upon an elderly jeweler who had once spent two weeks along the shores of Lake Cooper, visiting relatives up in Nauvoo. Had we been there? Had we! Yes, some of his people were living in Salt Lake City now, but the others had remained in Nauvoo. His own Southern branch of the family had never joined the Mormon Church. Still, he had enjoyed visiting in the old town, looking at what was left of the Mormon buildings. He liked it up there. It hadn't been just an ordinary vacation, it had been his honeymoon. We became very friendly over his recollections and compared notes on the town. And so it was this kindly jeweler who walked down the street with us to the cold white bank building, and identified us

as old friends. Then we decided that perhaps it wasn't a legend after all—this hospitality.

While we sat at dinner, that evening, a gentle breeze was bumping a skiff against the hull of the boat. The skipper went out and found a man struggling with a patent oarlock that wouldn't work.

"If I ever catch up with the guy that invented this . . ." He was not speaking for publication in Boston. "If I ever find the guy that sold me these rowlocks, I'll give him the 'Dobe Itch, all right!"

He was a short man with a hint of the military bearing that was carried out in the neatness of his khaki work clothes and his crisply trimmed mustache. Seeing the skipper on the guard, he continued an inspired tirade against the inventor and salesman of patent oarlocks. The skipper observed that his right hand was crippled and offered to help. But no, when he started to fix anything, he did it and nobody could interfere. At last he was satisfied, and then it was time for introductions. His hand reached out.

"Kennedy's my name, sir; Bob Kennedy, a Spaniard."

The skipper identified himself. Then he said:

"A Spaniard?"

"Yeah, a Spaniard. Veteran of the Spanish American War, you know."

Duly impressed, the skipper made further inquiries and learned that the visitor had a house-boat over on Mud Island just now, but he was bound down the river for New Orleans.

The skipper explained that he and his wife were headed for New Orleans, also. Then Bob was sud-

denly disturbed. He hadn't known there was a lady aboard. He certainly wanted to apologize for any cussing the madam might have overheard. Of course a patent rowlock would have anybody cussing sooner or later, but he was sorry, all the same. He was so embarrassed that he could not be persuaded to come in for a cup of coffee.

Next afternoon he crossed the river again and asked permission to tie his skiff alongside the Ark while he went up the hill for provisions, and on the way back he stopped to chat on the porch. At first he was rather reserved; but when he found out that the skipper had served in the army, he thawed out.

"A World War vet, eh! Got a disability?" He had a bird-like way of cocking his head and raising his eyes. "No? Well, you can get one! Know any Congressmen? You gotta have a Congressman. It's a big help to have one o' them behind you in Washington. Can't git nowheres otherwise. Now, I had two workin' for me. And it took both. I tell you, them docs there wasn't goin' to allow me nothin' at all. They fixed it, though, and now look at me. Fifty a month and my choice o' ten homes. I can live any place where there's a veterans' home. And when I git tired of it, I light out for a spell."

The mate appeared with strong black coffee.

"Ah, the madam knows how they make coffee on the river!" He was entirely won, and now the story came in an almost steady flow. He had been following the water for a living most of his life, on the Ohio River and on Lake Erie. That was how he happened to join up to go to the Philippines. They needed men

that knew boats. But before that, as a little shaver, he had shellacked caskets in a Pennsylvania village. Tiring of that trade, he ran away on an Ohio River packet. So he knew his rivers! Last year, when he wanted a vacation from the Soldiers' Home, he went up to St. Paul, bought his house-boat, fitted a pair of oars to the front end where there was an open deck, stenciled the words "St. Paul to New Orleans" on the hull, nailed a United States flag to the roof, and headed south.

As he explained it, he had been "wind-bound" here in Memphis the following winter. His right hand wasn't what it used to be before he got mixed up with the Filipinos, and the high walls of the cabin made it hard for one man to keep in the channel in a blow. Anyway, he had found congenial friends on Mud Island, among them a couple of "Spaniards" like himself.

The winter had passed quickly, but in the spring he had had to go back to a Soldiers' Home in the North, for his leave was up and if he failed to return he would lose his place to some one on the waiting list. It was three months before he could get another leave. But the friends he had left in charge of his boat had let it float over the island during the spring rise, and when he came back he found it had grounded. Most of the summer passed here, but now this last little rise had floated him off again. He was about ready for the second lap of the journey toward the Gulf. In a week or two he would be off.

As he talked, his confidence in us grew, and presently he was giving us his low-downs on Mud Island. There

were big doings over there, all right; bad class of people, though. He was quick to disclaim too intimate association; but living as he did where he could see what went on . . . well, it was just natural he should know.

Things had been kind of tight on the island in the past few weeks; they still were. It was a shame, because otherwise he could have taken the skipper over and showed him some sights that would make his eyes pop. But a river preacher had put in his boat there and hung around long enough to learn the way things were going. A guy from the Cumberland River, he was. He made a deal with the Government for five dollars a head for each bootlegger they arrested on his tip. There was a lot of activity for a spell, and the agents were just beginning to quiet down. Somebody had fired a couple of bullets into the preacher's boat one night, and he had had sense enough to pull out after that.

But things would be getting back into shape over there, pretty soon. There was a particular shack in the willows where a mixed gang from the river-bottoms and some of the dives uptown gathered when they were looking for high jinks. They had plenty of liquor and women, and they danced on the mud floor of the shack. Most of the whisky came from cookers on other islands, scattered down the channel below the city, but some was made here.

There was that half-sunk towboat over the way. Well, one of the biggest stills was right there and it was still operating. Revenuers all around, but dumb.

We'd be surprised. The system was like this: If we were standing upon the Memphis bluff right in front of that big red-brick warehouse, we could see a light in the old hull if it happened to be burning. But we'd have to stand right there to see it at all; it was arranged that way. Well, when the light was on, that meant that the place was open for business. Otherwise, nothing doing.

The skipper might care to run over there some evening when the light was on.

It was too bad it was so quiet over the rest of the island just now, but they'd had a scare and they were waiting. They were hardly ever disturbed. Somebody got bumped off, now and then, but it was all in the family and nobody bothered much. Usually the victim was a river vagabond whom nobody missed, and a body sunk in the Mississippi eddies was sunk for good. Of course the only reason for the doings on the island was that nobody from the city that amounted to anything ever set foot on it; and it had no permanent buildings, for everything was washed away each spring.

The skipper thanked Bob for the invitation to visit the still in the derelict. But in the morning a north wind came up and the dust and rubbish from between the cracks of the stone levee wheeled up in wavering circles. The skipper went out and bought three sacks of coal, and we made ready to leave Memphis, for a north wind would be a tail wind most of the time. It would help to push us down the channel. Christmas was coming, and here there would still be danger of snow. We said good-by to Bob Kennedy; perhaps later

on we should be seeing him somewhere. And we said good-by to Beale Street.

> Going to the river, honey, bye and bye,
> Going to that river and there's a reason why,—
> Because the river is wet and Beale Street done gone dry!

Chapter XXI

NO BOTTOM

THERE must have been a hundred wretched shanty-boats planted in the mud before the town of Helena. Where they had all come from was a mystery, but there they squatted, every which way, in loam so thick it was all we could do to set one foot before the other. Dusk was falling and a yellow lamp or two gleamed from a close room, enough to light up for the instant, as we walked by, some woman's indifferent gesture as she laid a dish of lard on the table.

These were silent people who eyed us suspiciously from the doorsteps, who moved unseeing past us through the half-dark, to spy resentfully from the corners of their eyes when we had gone on.

They lived here because nobody else would, and the mud and the wet and the weeds, the pungent rotted logs, and the rotting boards of hulls spoke in the sag of their shoulders and the sour lines about their mouths. If they had ever traveled in these boats, it was a long time ago. Perhaps some of them were people who had migrated from up-river, looking hopefully for the good delta soil to raise their crops, and perhaps they had just stopped here in Arkansas for a day or two and then stayed on forever. Well, it was not good enough, and they should have held to it

and gone on. Now the eternal mud and decay was all they had.

Early as we could in the morning we left this place. We pushed the Ark out into the still, bright river, and all that day moved serenely over shimmering water.

We began to play with the river and the channel lights, and when the government guide directed us to give a wide berth to a bar, we skirted it as close as we dared; when the lights would have led us miles around the outside of a broad bend, we cut straight across if it looked good to us. We thought we knew the river and we could tell when it was safe to disregard the marks and when it was wiser to follow them closely.

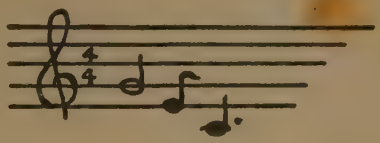
Windows and doors were open wide, for it was deliciously warm to-day. The air was soft and the gleaming ripples moved incessantly in reflected lights and shadows on the ceiling.

The mate lay on the guard outside, baking in the welcome sun. This was what we had dreamed it would be like in the South. She lay so still that a large butterfly came and lighted in her hair, opened and closed its wings slowly to the sunshine. It skimmed away and the mate dragged her finger in the water. Ah but the water was cold! But of course; it was winter where the river came from. December up there where we had been, where this very water had been a little while ago, was white and cold.

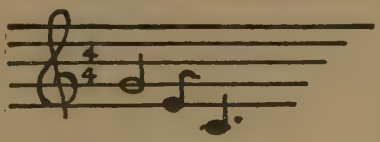
We traveled a long way that day. When darkness came we cut over along the edge of a submerged sandbar to Montgomery Point Light and tied up just below. There had been no one the livelong day, there was no one now. We were alone with the quiet river.

Life seemed a good thing, and the shanty-boat felt particularly complete that night as we sat down together. We were having hot cakes and sausages and baked apples, and we sat a long time idly afterward with our coffee, not saying much of anything, for it had been a dreamy day and its mood was still with us.

It was so quiet in the shanty-boat and on the river outside the windows that we heard it a long way off. Perhaps it was a mourning-dove. But no, the skipper thought he knew.



It was floating in the still, still night down the river. The skipper's hand had not moved from the coffee-cup as we waited for the far sharp call to drift down to us again. There . . .



Mark ta-wain

They were sounding, somewhere above us. A steamboat had lost the channel.

From the porch we saw their lights through the clear bluish night. A red and a green light forward and a mist of yellow flickers aft. But far, far forward,

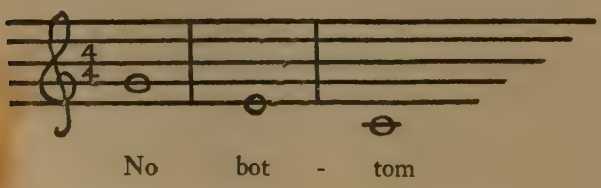
out on the river beyond the red and green running-lights of the boat itself, was another light. That would be the tip of the barge she was pushing. And it was from there that the singing came, slow and clear, at intervals as her pilot was urging her cautiously ahead.

The barge-load was being hurried to Vicksburg, perhaps, and they had been taking the channel into their own hands as we had done that day. Cutting short across the bend, they had skirted the bar up above, but they were in the night and their hulls drew more water than the Ark. Now they were running in the shallows.

Up in the dark, invisible pilot-house somewhere, the steamboat skipper was listening anxiously to the song of the man with the lead-line, answering each call with a bell, for the engineer, that drifted dimly down to us. The paddle-wheel was going at half-speed now; we could hear the careful swish of the blades through the water. Mark twain. That was two fathoms of water and they were safe still. But the barges were sometimes deeply laden.

"Quarter less twain!" It floated up from the tip of the barge and the pilot rang another bell, higher in key, sharper than the last. The wheel stopped. They were drifting slowly with the current. If it got much shallower, they would have to back out.

And then!



Long, loud, deep!

She had passed over the bar. She was over the edge, beyond the shallows, and now she was passing into deep water again.

"No-bot-tom!"

The pilot answered with the deep bell.

She was clear. She came forging full steam ahead, and she swept magnificently past our still mooring, on down the river into darkness.

Well, she was safe. She'd made it and now she was plunging on to make up for the time lost. Perhaps she'd had a pretty close call. We sat outside for a long while, the echo of the sounder's tune ringing in our ears. And we wondered if it wasn't better, perhaps, for us to trust to the marks and follow where they told us to go. For if we were ever caught on the mud in some desolate stretch like this, it might be a long time before we got away again. It might be until the high water came in the spring and floated us off.

We went on next day in a drizzling rain, past the mouth of the White River. Broad and brown it swept down from the right of us and it was dotted with motor-boats. At Rosedale Landing, just below, there was a cluster of small house-boats on shaped hulls, little cruisers, and open skiffs, all loading up with gasoline and provisions. The battle with the Canadian goose seemed to be at its height. As we passed we looked the boats over carefully, because at St. Louis we had met a retired steamboat pilot who was fitting up a fast cruiser to bring down here for the hunting. He could easily have passed us. But we did not see his outfit, and so we went on through the rain to where

the Arkansas River came in and below. For hours we ran along smoothly over the dim water.

Close by Catfish Towhead Light—we were following the marks carefully to-day—something went wrong with the motor and we shut it off. The Ark drifted while the skipper was cleaning the carburetor. The current had swung us about, but it carried us, stern first, in a fairly good course and about as we should have gone if we had been able to guide. It was a matter of ten minutes before the engine was right again and in that time we had floated about half a mile.

Toward mid-afternoon it rained more heavily; the engine was hot and great drops sizzled as they bounced off the muffler. The skipper let down a canvas awning —it looked like the grass-catcher on a lawn-mower, inverted—to protect it from the rain. Fog was coming up along the opposite bank, and with the rain too it was difficult to see the white triangles that mark the channel. One of us must always be on deck with the glasses to spy out the next mark ahead.

We could still see the near bank and we found Light 280 on the right; O'Bannon Point Light it was called. Next there should be four on the left, and below them Arkansas City on the right again, where we'd spend the night if we could make it. But meanwhile we must be looking for lights on the left. From here they were invisible because of the fog, but they were listed in the guide and we ought to find them when we got over. The mate gave the order to cross.

The skipper was not entirely satisfied. He stood on deck, peering through the straight rain, out over the water between us and the other shore. And the water

looked shallow, dangerously shallow. It didn't look like the right way to go. The night before, though, we had resolved to stick to the marks.

We started across. In five minutes both of us knew we had done the wrong thing and that the wrong was inevitable. There was a sand-bar just under the water ahead and it stretched to right and left of us, so that we couldn't circle it. Out on the guard, the skipper looked through his glass, back at the shore we had left. Yes, there was still another light there. We should have followed along that bank a little longer. There was another light there, all right, only somehow they had forgotten to list it in the book.

Nothing for us to do but to go on now if we could. For we could not trust the motor to carry us back up-stream. It would be hopeless to turn back against the current.

We picked our way ahead. The fog was coming a little closer, and a little closer, and it was increasingly difficult to read the water. All we knew was that it was shallow. We went on, expecting each moment to hear the dull rasp that would mean our propeller had caught. It would touch first, for it hung down several inches below the hull. Perhaps that would warn us. If that happened, perhaps we could still paddle to safety before it got even shallower. We had never tried to move the boat with paddles, but we thought we could do it.

The skipper stood out on the guard in the rain, his eyes straining to the river surface, telling the mate how to steer. Then he disappeared aft, leaving her to do what she could. He came back with an oar, wet about

a foot and a half up the blade, and laid it down on the porch. Now he took over the wheel.

The vague bulk of a mud bank emerged through the fog. Our nerves had grown very tight. But now we knew that we had crossed the bar. No-bot-tom! Wherever we were, this was deep water again.

But the fog was thick and now the engine was sputtering astern. Wearily the skipper went back to look after it. This was a bad day. Everything that could have happened all the way down, but somehow hadn't, seemed to have piled on us to-day. Now it was the motor. We were only dimly conscious of the high bank beside us, for we were muffled in mist, feeling our way very cautiously ahead. Then the engine stopped!

In vain the skipper cranked and cranked, in vain he bent over it in all the downpour and spun the flywheel. Nothing happened. The motor was sick and tired, that was all. And we weren't sure that we blamed it. Meantime we were drifting through the fog, we didn't know where. We hoped we were not being carried down some wandering slough, off the river.

We had to paddle for it. Buttoned in our slickers, we knelt, one on each of the guards. The rain poured in our faces and then down our necks as we bent and rose, trying to budge the Ark. It moved a little. Yes, gradually it responded. Very, very gradually.

The mate looked up from her paddle for a moment. The curtain of mist split and revealed a patch of the bank. And there, just over our heads, was the weak yellow ray of a channel light. Somehow we were in the channel again!

The boat edged in toward shore and we dropped

the anchor. This would do for the night. As long as we were in the main river it seemed safe. There was no telling how far we had come since the fog; possibly we had made a short cut by crossing the bar. Well, perhaps in the morning it would be clear.

Now that we were safe again, the skipper made a confession.

"Tell you what," he observed, "we were in a fix for a while, back there. I went back to look at the engine when you had the wheel and I watched her. Well, she was jumping. Every now and then she'd touch bottom and jump a little. So I plumbed with the oar. Well, there were about nineteen inches of water."

After supper we walked out on the porch, for the air was cooler. As we stood there a curious thing happened. The fog lifted for a moment over a glow of light across the bend. There were a steeple and a cluster of chimneys. Arkansas City was just across the river, sharp on the sky for that instant. Then it was lost again.

PART III

DELTA PEOPLE

Chapter XXII

HOLIDAY

A STEEL engraving of the steamboat *Natchez*—winner of the famous race, fifty years ago, with the *Robert E. Lee*—hung between two of the French windows, one of Lafayette between two others. Multiple crystal chandeliers swung above our heads as we seated ourselves on the heavily carved rosewood chairs, and across the room a tremendous mirror in an ornate gilt frame reached above the mantel to a distant ceiling. As we waited for food a white-jacketed negro, very erect, laid fresh copies of "The New Yorker" before us. The mate tenderly placed three violets in her water goblet.

We had arrived in Lake Providence in mid-afternoon and walked quickly up the bank to see what Louisiana looked like. The town itself was not visible from where we landed, for a dreary swamp of bottom-land stretched inland almost a mile. Then came the levee, and behind it the town. The little main street was forlorn enough, darkened by wide corrugated iron canopies over the sidewalks. Saddled mules were waiting, downcast, in the mud at the curbs, perhaps for the negroes who leaned against the buildings at nearly every corner, talking together, staring at everybody who walked by. In front of the drug-store a tractor

was nonchalantly pulled up, as if some plantation hand had carelessly made the trip to town on his iron mule. The road itself was so much deep soft mud and now a new Ford was skidding dangerously from side to side, splashing itself and the patient mules with a rich brown lather. Was Louisiana going to be dismal?

Then, up the street, we came to the lake for which the town must have been named. It looked very like the river itself, a long marshy swath of water bending out of sight, with cypress-trees at its verge. Some one told us it was part of the river once, but years ago it had been cut off when the main channel headed in a new direction. Out along here there were deep gardens in which roofs and columns were barely visible. Shrubbery, even now in winter, was amazingly full; vines were everywhere; trees had shot out their branches to make the thickest profusion of growth we had ever seen. Well, this was it, then. This was what people meant about the delta soil, the rich earth the river carried down and laid over the land in its southern basin. This was what it did. We passed a grove of stately wide-set pecan-trees, and then more of the comfortable houses far back from the street in the deeps of their gardens. Here the mate leaned down to the border of the walk and picked a few violets.

Now in the tea-shop the prisms and gilt and rosewood scrolls of the far South suddenly burst upon us. Foreign and sinful, the river evangelist had called the people who filled their houses with things like these. Well, we'd see. At the moment it was picturesque and after miles of the lonely river it was comforting. We had not known that one missed elegance. And if it was

sinful to set a table like this, sin was eminently satisfactory. For we could hardly count, and certainly not identify, the complexity of dishes set before us; but if we didn't know what we were putting into our mouths, we knew we liked it.

Just after the salad an amazing thing happened. The skipper looked up in time to see a short ruddy man, beaming like an elderly cherub, walk down the aisle. We hardly knew him in the leather jacket buttoned to his chin, and the high leather boots, but there was no mistaking this man. The skipper rose from his chair.

Where he had come from or why he was here in the little Louisiana village, there was no telling, but here was Oscar Ameringer, wandering journalist and raconteur extraordinary, of Oklahoma, Wisconsin, New York, and nearly everywhere else besides. Wherever Oscar had been, in coal-mines or capitals, a trail of fabulous yarns remained behind to keep his memory fresh until he came again with a new knapsackful to tell; and with us it was particularly warm.

Where we had come from was just as perplexing to Oscar, but at the moment it was scarcely important. We all sat down together and now another procession of dishes made its way to our table.

It was late before we were ready to leave, and by that time we had made the acquaintance of nearly every one in the shop, for there was no one Oscar didn't know. Christmas was coming soon, they reminded us. Surely we would stay and spend the holidays here with them? In Lake Providence, Christmas was really celebrated. We'd see; we shouldn't regret it if we stayed!

Three abreast, the skipper, the mate, and Oscar walked down the darkened town then, down to the shanty-boat. And when morning began to lighten, all of us were still deeply engaged in accounting for ourselves. Except, of course, that there really was no accounting for Oscar. We were satisfied, though, to believe everything he told us; it was more fun that way.

Two elderly ladies in hats and gloves were stepping carefully down the bank toward the shanty-boat. The skipper hurried out to offer his arm over the crude steps he had cut in the earth. On the porch, they rubbed a little of the dirt from their shoes, smoothed down their skirts, and presented their cards to the mate.

They had come to call on the visitors from the North.

For in a delightful open-hearted sense we seemed to have become, in a day or so, visitors to the entire community; and this Louisiana village knew the responsibilities and pleasures of hospitality and practised them with a half-formal generosity that quite eclipsed any legend we had ever heard about the South.

The ladies seated themselves and inquired if we had had a pleasant voyage. They hoped there had been no mishaps. It had been a quiet winter so far, but January on the river usually brought storms. We should have to be careful in January.

After a little they examined the interior of the boat and the mate explained its domestic economy. But presently they were asking what made it go, and they were not satisfied until that too was explained in detail. In

their questions they were exhibiting an astonishing knowledge of the problems of river navigation.

"We don't get down to the river very often, these days," the elder woman remarked. "But in the old times we used to be down here a great deal. Living away off there behind the levee, we don't see it at all, you know. It sometimes seems we never think of it except in the high water. Then I reckon we think plenty of it!"

"And we used to come down here to call, every now and then," her companion added. "Years ago, you know, when the river was being surveyed. Every now and then a government engineer would pull in here with his house-boat, making the survey. His wife would sometimes be lonely, after spending weeks on the river. And so we would always come down to call. But that was away back yonder, years ago."

"When I was a girl, Mother used to say I was a regular river-rat!" The elder lady laughed. "I was down here all the time, with my brothers. Well, the river was different in those days. There was some excitement then! Steamboats were always going by, strangers were always stopping in on their way to New Orleans. Is it as lonely as this on the upper river now?"

"There are fewer boats there than there are down here," said the skipper. "No packets at all."

"Ah, I'll never forget that summer I spent on the upper river! Did you have a good trip through Lake Pepin?"

The lady knew Lake Pepin! Eagerly—here was some one who understood—we told her how we had run the lake.

"I can understand how you felt. We went up there for the fishing; oh, it must have been nearly forty years ago! My father had grown tired of the Gulf coast. So we took a steamer up to St. Louis and visited there a few days. Then we boarded another boat for St. Paul. And all along the way, through Wisconsin and Iowa, we were hearing about a terrible disaster in the lake a few weeks before. An excursion steamer had turned over in a hurricane and every one was drowned."

"The *Sea Wing*?" asked the mate.

"That was it! The *Sea Wing!* She'd turned turtle and thrown everybody into the lake. And my mother was frightened. But it was a calm day when we came through, and so it passed off well."

These ladies, too, urged us to stay over the holidays. "We should like to show you something of the town, you know."

We stayed. And from then on, there was scarcely a moment to stand still, for at Christmas-time Lake Providence opened all its doors. There was a party somewhere or other almost every evening, and in the daytime no man thought of working. The holidays began days before Christmas and this was the season for hunting. The skipper was taken out to an island below, one early morning, for wild geese; another day the hounds were brought out after quail. Then a deer-hunt was organized. Horses were found for us and in a great party we rode through the woods, dark and lifeless now but for an occasional splashy red vine, the always green live-oaks, and the clusters of heavy mistle-

toe high up in the branches. We waited at the edge of an open place in the forest while the dogs did their work; waited a long time, listening. Then the terrified buck dashed through the clearing and the guns rang out.

We were taken to visit plantation houses and driven about the country-side. There were game dinners and a fancy-dress ball; a meeting of the music club, with singing and whistling by talented members of the community; and a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, which the skipper solemnly addressed. The curious thing about this community, to us, was that while so many of the pleasant traditions of older times survived, there was another spirit, too. Everybody was talking about the "new South." The town was run by young men. The boys who tore through the woods with their hounds, who danced at the Christmas parties until morning, were the same boys who served on the school board, in the Chamber of Commerce, and on the "police jury," which is the same as a county board. There was a sense of change. Something was brewing in the South—this patch of it, at any rate.

Christmas Day brought packages from home, and, with Oscar and a group of newer friends, a tour of egg-nog parties through the town and the surrounding country. Every door was open and the punch-bowls were never empty. Sliced turkey and all its fixings stood on the buffet and we all helped ourselves as the spirit moved us. Then we went on to carry our greetings to the next house.

Chapter XXIII

NOBODY'S FRIEND

A SLUGGISH stream, a muddy sort of elongated pond moving thickly, slowly, even slatternly toward the Gulf of Mexico—that was the impression of the Mississippi somehow conveyed in the geography books of childhood.

Well, sometimes it looked like that from the bank; and in some of its moods, of course, it was like that. The whole truth, though, we were beginning to think, was that our old Father of Waters was deceitful and even sinister. The insistent tonnage of water, converging from all the Middle West, inevitably pouring into the basin of the Mississippi, then pushing its irresistible weight down and down until it could spread itself in the Gulf, was an awesome thing.

They feared it, the men and women who lived out their lives along its banks. They were always telling us what had happened here, and over there.

For us the gaiety of adventuring over the winding surfaces from North to South was by now mixed with a kind of somber respect, for we had seen enough of the up-stream gales lash the water into treacherous jerking waves, piling up steep over the sucking eddies. We had spent months, happy months, following where it led, but we knew now that there were times when it

lashed out to strike; and it was not certain, it was never certain any more, that it would allow us to go on, all the way down to New Orleans. There was always a threat. We had put ourselves at its mercy and our awe for it was like a deep-seated, only half-acknowledged superstition. Macabre Mississippi—that was it.

Of course there were the long gleaming intervals. Vicksburg on New Year's Day—dead of winter, in Mississippi—was brilliant and barely cool. We wandered over Walnut Hills all that bright day and saw where Union and Confederate troops had fought. This was where bewildered hayseeds from Michigan had had their terrible meeting with the boys from the Alabama plantations. Here in this sharp sunlight the camp had been where they used to sing "Tenting To-night," and there, scarcely out of sight behind the knoll and surely not out of hearing, other boys had sung of a bonnie blue flag.

It will probably always remain in our minds as sharp as a miniature, for the fog swallowed us so soon afterward. We were ready to leave Vicksburg; but when we awoke, a dense mist had muffled the river. The larder was full, the motor greased, and Natchez lay only a hundred miles below. We had heard glamorous tales of old Natchez. Gloomily we sat on the porch, waiting.

A little breeze came up by and by, lifting gingerly at the mists. Slowly, lazily, they were beginning to drift off. As soon as we could see fifty yards before our noses, we were pushing out of Vicksburg harbor, down the Yazoo River. But possibly there had been a blunder in the technique of oiling that magnificent old

engine of ours which had already put in nearly fifteen hundred miles, for it began to sputter and spit as we headed down.

One particularly explosive cough was followed by complete and desolating silence. The skipper hurried back to crank. It started, but only to sputter again, cough, and be still. Rather dismally we drifted, and we saw that the fog, which had seemed on its way to melting altogether, was settling thicker again. It began to look as if we might lose our way in Vicksburg harbor, not knowing which way to turn, unable to turn if we did know.

The fog-horn of a ferry-boat droned out a melancholy warning. It was close, much too close. The skipper gasped and bent over the motor once more. It would not be so easy to try to paddle the shanty-boat out of the path of a ferry approaching behind a quilt of fog! The engine started again, ran, kept on running, for five minutes.

We started and drifted, started and drifted, for perhaps two and a half miles, and in this way an hour passed. The top of the Vicksburg bluff, above a belt of fog, was not even out of sight when the wind swooped down. It might blow away the fog; still, the wind was no friend of ours. As if to show that it meant business, it caught the Ark in one of the engine's idle intervals and pushed it clear about, and so we were headed back to the harbor. This was all wrong! The lifting fog revealed ominous clouds that moved swiftly overhead. A winter storm was coming this way.

Our business was plain. When the skipper sighted a tiny bay, a little farther along, where a stream seemed

to join the river, he headed the limping shanty-boat that way and we tied up. There was no use making a permanent landing, we thought, since we were just pausing here till the storm broke and passed, and meanwhile the skipper would be tinkering with the motor. We snubbed a couple of lines, fore and aft, about a stump, and the skipper took his tools astern. A drop of water was eliminated from the gasoline feed-line, and then all was well with the motor and we were ready to go on as soon as it pleased the elements.

We waited. Perhaps it would be an hour; perhaps—out in the channel the water had darkened to lead—all the rest of the day. The wind blew fresher and steadier; already it had brushed the air clean of fog. We saw great bulbous clouds piling overhead and it began to look as if a bad storm were heading up. In that case our careless mooring wouldn't do. We weren't even in a very well-protected place, after all, for the wind was rattling at the west windows. Better if we had gone farther up into the little stream, perhaps. We closed down all the windows, shut the doors, and thought the situation over.

The skipper stood watching the water that swept toward us with the cross-current winds, balancing himself to the gentle responsive motion of the boat. He looked up at the sky.

"We'll have just about time, I guess," he announced deliberately, "to get fixed right before she breaks. Come on."

The wind caught at us as we stepped out the door. There was excitement in the air! But we had work to do. The skipper's idea was to free the Ark but for one

stern line and let that one out as long as possible; then to walk along the bank, pulling the boat into the shelter of the stream and making it fast there. The wind pouring up our sleeves, tearing at our hair, we climbed up the bank and began. We should have to work fast.

The lines were freed and we stood holding them. The next thing was for the skipper to let his out and fasten it at the bit, leaving the Ark plenty of play to be drawn along back. He bent down to loop the rope about the stump and it was then that the gale rode down. This was deadly earnest. It snatched at the shanty-boat and whipped it out toward the open water.

The skipper's fingers tightened like a vise on his line. But the mate sprawled on the mud-bank, astonished and empty-handed. For the wind had caught up the boat with such sudden violence that her rope was ripped from her hands. It was gone. Dangling uncertainly before us, at the end of the only remaining hawser, was our little roomful of comfort, all we had in the world.

The skipper's bare teeth met, his heels dug holes deep in the mud, he had the end of the line around his waist. At the other end of it the shanty-boat was swinging to and fro below us. A few more feet and it must be swept out from the stream's mouth into swift water. And then, with the gale and the current both against him, he could never keep his hold, for the line was wet and the mud soft. Then the shanty-boat, the comfortable, warm little shanty-boat, would go rolling down the river alone until—it crashed into a bank somewhere and was broken up.

The mate crept along to where the skipper stood

fighting the wind, grasped the line, and added her strength and weight to his. We pulled and slowly it seemed the Ark was beginning to feel it, was edging, inch by inch, toward us again. Yes, we were getting it. Then rain came down, fierce, hard, and cold.

There was no way of knowing all that happened. With a wrench the skipper managed to get the line snubbed around a stump. The rain was turning to hail as the two of us tugged on the line again, bringing the boat closer, bit by bit. Hailstones stung our skin as for one perilous second the mate held the line alone while the skipper caught a hitch. Then that one line was fast.

We wanted to shout. We wanted to yell like the wind and wave our arms overhead. It was glorious to strain so hard in a driving storm, to save all that we had. Mentally we were doing these things, away back in a closet of our minds, behind a well-closed door. But it was no time for that.

The mate found her lost line, dragging by the water's edge. Up the wet mud-bank she came with it, slithered, stumbled, got a foothold again, brought it to the skipper. Mud was over everything, hailstones were in our ears. Our drenched clothes were whipped against shuddering skin, hair was matted to our heads, the gale beat at our backs. The skipper took the line and then he looked at the girl.

"You go lie down," he said. "Get behind that log there."

She stood for a moment, uncertain, and too tired to brace herself against the beating downpour. But it was better, there in the mud behind the log. It was a tiny oasis, almost calm. It was good to be there. . . . But

only for a moment, only until she had got her breath and her teeth were not chattering quite so much.

The worst of it was over now. We got the boat up into a calmer place and began to make it quite, quite fast. Rough as a dull saw, the wind nagged at us; but it didn't matter so much any more, because the boat was going to be safe. With a little more work, a little more pulling and straining at the lines it would be over. We'd won. We had saved the shanty-boat. Yes, it was safe. This wild half-hour and it was safe again, the stoutest lines all tight.

Smeared with mud, completely soaked, we stood on the little porch. Small pools gathered at our feet and flowed along the floor, but we hardly knew. For we were looking across our little private yard of still water, over to a raging river. We sighed and opened the door. And in there it was dry and cozy and gay—it had been all this perilous time—and a fire was snapping in the stove! For us there was clean, dry clothing and soon a steaming pot of black coffee.

For a long time we sat behind windows streaming with rain and watched. Out beyond the mouth of the stream the wind was flogging the river to a wilderness. But we were safe inside, warm and deliciously drowsy.

The rest of that day and all of the next the wind raged spasmodically at the river. We could not think of venturing out. Natchez and, somewhere below it, New Orleans, began to seem a long way off. We were taking nothing for granted now, we were disciplined by the river. We hoped we could run the whole of it, that was all; we were no longer counting on that or on anything.

But it was quiet with us, and the shanty-boat rarely was more delightful or more completely our home than on days like this when it was tied up in a still mooring while wind and rain embittered a whole world outside. Dreamy afternoons passed. We stoked the fire and settled with our books, getting up now and then to stir a pot of something on the stove, pausing a moment to look out on the savage river from which we were secure. Branches were torn from their trunks, a mud bank caved and rumbled into the water, waves were running before the wind; but here with us it was quiet.

One of these storm-bound days, we developed films and made some careful prints; another, we kept close to the stove, read, and wrote a little. The mate took a long, thoughtful time over the preparation of food, because the meals were the only things that happened; and for another reason, too. Supplies might run low if we were held here long.

The storm passed on the third night, but in the morning the world was opaque with fog; we could not see the water. We flattened our noses against the windows.

"Winter on the lower Mississippi means only one thing," the skipper observed, "and that's fog."

"It looks like it."

"Yes. Want me to tell you why?"

"You might as well. You might as well do that as anything else."

"Well, it's this way: The river water, coming down the Missouri from Montana and the Yellowstone, down the Ohio from the Alleghanies, and down the upper river from northern Minnesota, is ice-water to

begin with, and it never really warms up. No, I guess it never warms up. But the air down here is . . . well, tepid, you see. And so the moisture in the air is condensed by the chill of the river. It is condensed into this fog that we see all about us."

"I see. . . . There's nothing else to see."

"An elementary principle of physics," mused the skipper with as much satisfaction as if by explaining the fog he had explained it away.

But the mate was a little abstracted; she was thinking of something else.

"How would you like your beans for lunch?" she inquired. The question was not entirely irrelevant. Surveying our stock of food in the hold one day, we had discovered rows of canned red beans which, somehow proving unpopular on the shanty-boat, had been ignored. Now that it was so doubtful that we should find a grocery store in the near future, we were thriftily eating them as often as possible, to save the few things we had bought in Vicksburg.

There was also a question of funds. In Natchez there would be money waiting, but suppose we should never reach Natchez. Suppose the fog should cling to the river, to be swept away only by an occasionally incipient hurricane or a hail-storm, and return again, and so on until spring. We went through all of our pockets and turned the drawers upside down, until a mound of nickels and quarters was amassed.

But these had no value whatever now. They were even less nourishing, we thought, than those unpalatable pearls on the Sahara Desert that should have been dates. In spite of any impression to the contrary, there

The cone of smoke came from a steamer up to its stacks in fog

are great—oh, almost interminable—spaces in the United States where it is impossible to dispose of a nickel.

Here we were with our little mound of small change, and numerous cans of kidney-beans, sitting in a gloom of fog. Helpless! The water was too cold for fishing; and as for water-fowl, we couldn't see them if there were any. Well, you couldn't take the river for granted. You couldn't plan. You pushed out into the channel and you took your weather and your water as you found it.

The beans were seasoned with vinegar that night, for a change.

Then a clear day came. Not that we trusted it! In five minutes the complexion of the world might be wholly distorted. But we were up as soon as the sun was, and pushing out. This day we were going to find some hamlet behind the levee, or some plantation store,' or something! It was a clear day.

We did have a good run that day; at least, we had what by this time we were willing to call a good run. The sun stayed with us and the wind was only enough to make it a sport to mind the wheel. And as the afternoon was waning, we saw the upper half of a white house behind the levee; not a grand old plantation house, but at least a place where people lived. It looked like security; and also, perhaps, a place where we could get something to eat. The mate hailed it enthusiastically. But the skipper, looking with greater care, discovered that the banks below the house, and for as far as he could see on each side of it, rose sheer and

high from the water. It was a caving bank. The river had been cutting there for a long time, probably. Eventually it would reach the house itself. This was no place to tie a shanty-boat.

We had to pass the house and go on down four or five miles farther. Even here there was no really good place to land, but darkness was coming and so we selected a nook on the fringe of a wandering sand-bar. The river was cutting here a little, too.

The skipper took a long time to tie the boat. Dinner was ready and waiting by the time he had finished. There were no convenient trees or stumps and he had driven stakes well back on the sand-bar, to tie the lines to; he had staved off the boat securely with the stage-plank, to keep it from bumping the shore if the wind came this way. We went to bed.

Perhaps we had been sleeping a long time; we didn't know. Both of us sat upright in bed, astonished.

"What is it?"

"I know what it is, all right," said the skipper.

The Ark was swerving rhythmically up and down under us, and with each shoreward swing there was a ponderous thud. Wind whistled through the porch screens as we sat feeling it, and of course it was plain enough what had happened. The waves were bumping the boat against the sand-bar.

The skipper stumbled across the heaving floor to find a flash-light, and he brought robes and slippers also. He looked at the watch; it was just midnight. Then we went out into the wind to see what was going on.

Even from the porch, it was easy to see. For one

thing, our gang-plank was no longer holding us from the bank; it must have washed away. With the next landward swing of the boat, we jumped ashore. We saw that the wind had switched to the northwest and was whipping rollers across the channel, straight toward us. They heaved the Ark against the bank as they came and each time the boat struck it broke away a little more of the sand. This must have been going on for some time, for a considerable portion had already been eaten down and dropped into the river and the Ark was thus working its way closer and closer all the time to the stakes where the lines were tied.

It rode into the shore on each wave as we watched, only to be sucked back and hurled up once more. The stakes, all the security there was, were now pretty close to the water's edge. If they were swept down, our lines would be free and the shanty-boat could go foot-loose down the stormy river. It was a strange night to be standing on a desolate shore of the Mississippi River, thinking of that. For there wasn't any moon, there were no stars; only the swift damp air.

We turned back into the rolling boat, lighted a lamp, and dressed carefully.

And then, with our flash-lights, we began to work. We slaved! The wind was rushing at us, the boat was thundering against the shore at our feet as we took up the stakes, one by one, moved them far up the bank, drove them into the sand again, and retied all the lines. The skipper found the gang-plank floating by a single rope—the other had broken—under the bow, rescued it, and managed to stave off with it once more. There was no knowing how long that would hold up under

the constant pounding of the waves. But, then, perhaps the storm would pass in time.

It was just growing light when we stood up, stretched, brushed our hands, and surveyed the work. Three hours' work. The wind blew hair into our eyes and whipped our clothes tight across our shoulders. But we thought we had a good mooring, good enough to last as long as we had need of it.

We were turning wearily to go in when a strange, an unbelievable thing happened. There was an abrupt lull. For one amazing minute there was no wind, only a silence. The whole world hung poised, holding its breath. Then, from the south, there came a sudden gust of warm air. We looked up and in the faint early light fancied we could actually see the clouds rushing from opposite directions for a collision. As we watched, there was another lull, and then quiet rain. Our work was done.

Sunshine woke us, later. The air was bright and stinging, the river, broken into a million tiny waves by the merest breeze, sparkled like a shattered mirror. Only our crazy footsteps in the sand, partly washed out now, told of the frantic night that was past.

But we had stayed too long in bed. A brisk south wind was rising as we put out into the channel and before we had run an hour we were beginning to have more than a sporting fight with it. Tough luck! A head wind, which was also an up-stream wind, was tricky to argue with. Yes, we were caught again. There was only one thing to do and we did it. We looked for shelter.

Ah, but we were then on the outside of a vast bend; and that, of course, was the exposed side. We might

try to cross. But once out there in the middle of the river, we should be at the mercy of steep, almost vertical waves. There was no cove where we were, no shelter for the Ark, but where the precipitous bank seemed to curve inward ever so slightly, we turned in, and with the lines over his shoulder the skipper climbed up through wet mud and found a couple of cottonwoods to tie them to. Well, there was a kind of security in that. Our ropes were bound around something with roots in the ground!

Still, he was not easy about our mooring. It might do, if the wind grew no worse. The boat was rocking, of course, but we were used to that. The trouble was that this was a caving bank; the river had been eating at the land here. We didn't know how long this mooring would last us.

Sometimes, now, we were thinking of the river as the enemy.

Uneasy hours went by. At intervals one or the other of us scanned the water with the glass, to see if it wasn't beginning to calm down enough for us to start. But there was no change, and we could not make up our minds whether it would be wiser to stick it out here and take what came with the night, or risk the river in order to find shelter on the inside of the bend, far across. Whitecaps separated us from there. We looked out over the barrier of waves breaking upstream in mid-channel, and that did not look like a good place to take the Ark. The afternoon passed in uncertainty and darkness was coming.

It was the *Francis E. Richardson* that forced us to make up our minds. We couldn't exactly blame the

Richardson for passing so close. A substantial government stern-wheeler, she was having her own troubles with the storm. Even she had to hug the bank. And inevitably, as the deep-water channel went, she had to make a turn just abreast of us. Towering above the shanty-boat, she made her turn; and then, her mammoth stern wheel flush toward us, scarcely fifty feet away, she began to plow off up-stream.

From that paddle-wheel came mountains of water. From it came galloping a whole range of water mountains. All along, without the help of the *Richardson,* waves had been running our way. Now this terrifically augmented onslaught. We ran out and braced our feet in the mud, to hold off the boat when it should begin to ride them up the bank, for there was no use expecting the gang-plank to stave off now. There wasn't even time to try to save it from being crushed.

We had to get out of the way, ourselves, when the stern-wheel wake reached the boat. Ridiculous. It was ridiculous to think of holding out against it. Up came the Ark, into the bank, back it went on the undertow, and up it rode once more. This happened seven times. With the last the bow dislodged a groaning mass of earth from the embankment. A ton, perhaps. The earth settled over the boat—a little on the roof, more against the bow, and a mass on the starboard guard. With the avalanche, the stern line wrenched and gave way. A brace under the guard snapped and the boards bowed under the weight of dirt.

The mate snatched an oar and began picking at the earth, trying to shovel it off. The skipper knotted the broken rope. Then he stood still, watching.

"Well, we might as well sink in the middle of the river as be buried alive here," he said.

There was no choice. The sun was setting behind a bank of clouds now, and we had tried to run through the dusk only once before, for dark came too quickly and the shores were treacherous. But literally there was no choice.

We stood looking for a moment at the heaving river we had to get across. Neither of us ever had been thrust so unmercifully against necessity before. But now there was nothing to do but go and try to get to the sheltered side while the last faint glow still shone on the water.

We climbed up the bank and undid the lines, rolled them in neat loops, and hung them up on their spikes. Cautiously the skipper edged out the stage-plank—and immediately the wind drove the boat aground. With the pike-pole and the oar we pushed. Standing on the narrow crippled guard, bracing our backs against the cabin, we matched our force against that of the wind and water combined, to loosen the hull from the mud. Finally it was afloat again, and the mate had to hold it off until the engine was started.

We were off. The motor was open all the way, and more. As the boat ventured diagonally into the channel—the skipper was trying to keep out of the trough of the waves—the wind whistled under the eaves and rumbled along the roof. We got out a little farther, and waves pounded the bow, thundered alongside, shocking the boat so it quivered, rolling it into one nose dive after another; up again till its stern pitched down. And every time it lurched aft we knew that the

engine must be awash, and we could not help wondering how long it would hold out under that.

We came into midstream—half over soon!—and the waves were faster. Now they splashed up our windows and one broke over the front porch and up against the glass through which the skipper looked to steer, leaving it streaked with mud. It was dark enough already, without that, but there was no thought of wiping it now. This was a fight. The skipper was standing with hands tight to the wheel, and his feet wide apart to brace him against the roll and jerk of the floor. The mate, as tense and as quiet, stood beside him.

Once she did go aft for a minute.

"Hey! Where are you?" the skipper, not daring to turn his head, called imperatively.

"Oh, I was just . . . looking things over." She had been getting together what money there was and wondering what else to take in case the boat finally swamped and we had to swim for it!

"Well, you come back here," said the skipper, very quietly. "You must stay here with me."

She came back.

It was getting worse and worse; it was getting so bad that we scarcely noticed now when water splashed over the cabin in sheets and ran deep on the front porch. We were watching the bank. We were half-way to it now. We were in the thick and we had only to hold out. The skipper had only to choose by inches the right spot to meet each wave to keep it from turning us over, the engine had only to keep up its dogged *put-put* and we'd make it.

Then along came a massive roller. Both of us grimly

watched it, inevitable and awful, heaving our way. We had to head flush for it. Then it came. The shanty-boat trembled on the towering crest and the gods descended. There came an abrupt squall, a sudden cyclonic whirl full upon the boat.

It was too much. The shanty-boat gave up the fight. It slithered down into the trough, and we rocked in a valley of water. Pictures flapped against the walls and books slid to the floor as we rolled to and fro. Each time it seemed as if we must tip over, all the way; each time we were lifted up and over in the other direction. Swamped with water, the motor somehow kept on running, but we went nowhere. Barely able to keep on our feet, we somehow clung to the wheel.

Suddenly the wind rushed at the boat again, twisted it half about once more, headed us up-stream. Out of the trough.

"All right, God damn you! You don't want us to go down-stream. We'll go up-stream!"

The only thing that mattered was to keep afloat. That was all. But, as the skipper tried to pick his way across the waves in the new direction we felt there was not much hope. For the motor, we knew, was of little use against the current.

We were doing it, though. We made headway. The boat still threatened sometimes to turn over, but it kept going. The reason was that the wind was with us now, not against us. And what a wind! Apparently it was enough to counteract the push of the current. For presently we found that going was actually easier this way. There was no more wind to buck, but wind to help us instead. Slowly our anxiety was eased and we saw that

we were coming closer, painfully but steadily closer, to the sheltered shore.

The Ark floated into comparative calm. A submerged sand-bar, not far out from the bank, gave us a moment's peace where the waves could not come. As the boat slid along, the skipper turned the wheel over to the mate, went out on deck himself with the glasses. He came back jubilant. There was a pocket, a quiet pocket completely sheltered from the wind, only a little farther ahead. A couple of skiffs were lying there. The skiffs meant people. *People.*

We turned in.

The shanty-boat rested in still water. We looked up the bank and then we saw that our crossing had had an audience. Two men stood up there. Silently, as though greeting were unnecessary, they came down to help us tie up.

We were working at the lines when a woman's voice floated down from the bank high over our heads.

"Oh Will! Charlie! Supper's ready. Come on, you-all!"

Just as though there never had been any gale, any house-high waves, any buffeted shanty-boat. The world had come to its senses again. Somebody's supper was ready. The river had been a wilderness. But now here was a home, where people lived.

They invited us to come up, later on, and spend the evening in their tent.

Chapter XXIV

WILL AND MARY

WILL greeted us at the top of the hill: "Well, sir, I sure thought you-all wasn't goin' to make that crossin'. Couple times, there, she looked like she was fixin' to spill clean over. Then again, I thought you'd 'a' swamped, sure. But here y'all are now, safe and sound. Come in!"

He lifted the flap of the tent.

We saw two wide iron beds, and close between them a great flat cook-stove, glowing hot. The earth floor was bare. As we came in, a dirty pack of cards was pushed back among the loose quilts and people rose from the bedsides.

"Evenin'. Evenin', I'm sure."

There were Mary, who was Will's wife, and Charlie, his brother, with his wife, and Will's small boy. Behind them something grabbed at one of the cards; a baby was lying wide-eyed on a pillow.

They drew a couple of kitchen chairs up between the beds and so all together we sat close by the stove. The shyness gradually dropped away and the talk was of the river, our fight with it that day, and then one by one of all the storms that any of us ever had seen or heard about. The river grew mysterious, sinister, as the talk went on. These people had always lived some-

where along the Mississippi; it was their means of earning their bread. Yet they were in terror of its moods; as nearly as anything, it was the spirit of evil in their lives.

"That ole muddy, she ain't nobody's friend," Mary said. "She's 'most ever'body's grave."

It seemed quite true.

Gusts of wind bellied the tent, counter-gusts slapped it back, and the fear of the river wove in and out of nearly all that was said. Stories were told of log rafts that broke up, of children who were drowned, of fishermen who went out to run their nets and never came back. The wind howled through the leafless sycamores and cottonwoods, lifting the roof of the tent, slamming it down again, blowing showers of sparks down the chimney.

The bright-red stove seemed the only constant element in an uncertain world. The tent was a slim sheaf between us and its chances. For there was a sense of excitement, of something happening—partly that wild undertone of wind—about us as we sat there, talking, by the fire. Partly, too, it must have been because strangers, travelers from away up-country, had turned up in a lonely place. For laughter would suddenly and unaccountably die in a thoughtful hush, and this again was shattered by some one's restless movement. Old wives' tales, superstitions, idle notions that had not been thought of in years seemed to be rushing forward to be told.

Mary's little boy stood by the skipper's chair, listening in awful earnest to all that was said. Nobody thought of telling him to curl up on a corner of one

of the beds. Sometimes he quite forgot himself and put a hand on the back of the chair. When the story ended he took it off again and glanced around quickly to see if any one had noticed.

But Mary in particular was tingling. She could hardly keep still. She kept throwing another and still another chunk of sycamore into the stove and she seemed to be always walking over to the buckets of river water, placed in a corner to settle, and dipping up a drink, or pausing to roll one of her expert little cigarettes and light it with ever so slight a youthful swagger. Sometimes, dipper in hand, she interrupted imperiously to improve a story (oh, she knew her river!) or she slapped Will and burst out in an uncontrollable little laugh.

She was just twenty, delicately rounded, and little. Her face was appealing, partly because of a short nose, a short upper lip, and mischievous, untidy light hair. Her husband was not much taller, but he was strong and stocky. He seemed to have been about more; he knew how things were. But he had absolutely no sense when it came to Mary. He giggled with her, poked at her now and then, and fended off her bucolic slaps as though she were a possum he had got for a pet, not a woman full-grown who was the mother of a boy going on six.

All of them were living together in the tent that winter. The men were employed by a plantation, to scale logs and start them in rafts down the river. There was a log camp down-stream, and the plantation house was a couple of miles away, through the cottonwood forest.

This was an island, formed by a chute, they said. When they went to town they used a small gas-boat to go eighteen miles down-river, and from there they walked five more unless they could borrow an automobile. Mary's mother had a place down there and she owned a Ford. That made it handy. Still, it took the best part of a day to get to town, even if the weather held good, and it wasn't more than a handful of houses, two stores, and a post-office, when you did get there.

Mail was brought to the log camp twice a week by a small boat. For supplies they used the plantation store, through the woods. But there wasn't much call for them to go over there, because they kept a few hens, and there was enough salt meat from the hog Mary had killed, to last through the winter. They had a sack of hominy grits and a sack of corn-meal, some dried butter-beans, and a tub of lard from the hog. Now and again they might open a can of vegetables, but these and coffee and tobacco were the only things they ever bought at the store. When there was no more tobacco they would pick their way over the vague lumber-trails to the plantation.

Well, it was one way to live. Nothing much happened but the river. Yet it was always a different river, every day. . . .

Midnight came and went and we realized we were very tired. It had been a strange day. Death had seemed very close for a few long moments. Then at the end we had found this place, isolated, desolate in a way, but warm, and these friendly people talking about the river. Yes, we wanted to sleep now.

The circle broke up. People stretched, stood awkward, became a little shy again. Then Will asked us why we didn't keep the boat here and stay. Not go right on down-river again in the morning. Stay with them a while.

We said perhaps we would.

The wind had swept the sky clean and the moon was shining. The scarred shanty-boat lay at ease in a swath of light and beyond it a strange river sparkled. Where the moonlight shone it was gay, happy, alluring. Down along the shadowed bend, where it swept out of sight, there was a hint of something old and ominous. We thought of what we had heard up in the tent. It was a queer river and hard to know. Down-river bound. Yes. Well, there was no telling what that might mean.

Silently we went aboard the shanty-boat and silently to bed.

Of course the entire tent household was up and well under way by the time we showed our heads next morning. It was Sunday and Charlie had gone to hunt rabbits; his wife was taking a nap. Breakfast was well over and beans were started for dinner. The place was scrupulously neat to-day and a canvas had been laid over the earth floor.

Mary and Will were taking us through the woods to the plantation store this morning. A raw morning it was, too. The mate buttoned her leather jacket close up about her throat and was glad of the woolen frock and the high walking-boots she wore. Then Mary appeared from behind a curtain. She had on a scant little black-serge coat that fitted her close, and under it a high-waisted gingham dress. On her feet were little

black patent-leather slippers. Well, it was Sunday and there was company.

So the four of us started out.

They weren't very sure of the way to the plantation, because they went there so seldom, and there was no path, only a network of dim lumber-trails. Between them they argued hotly about the right way to go; and indeed it was rough enough, the way we were going. Once Mary stood poised on a rotten log, ready to jump a puddle, when her foot slipped. She came very near a fall. Regaining her balance, she stood up straight on the log, above her husband, and shook her finger at him. She looked very like an angry little pullet.

"I tell you, you're takin' me the wrong way!" she scolded. "Well, we'll see. And if you're takin' me wrong I know what I'll do after we get home."

Will giggled up at her and then helpfully jerked her over the puddle. Mary sputtered on:

"I'll take me a shillaly to you, Willie, that's what. I'll come out here in the woods this evenin' and cut me a shillaly and I'll lay it to you if you're takin' me wrong. Now, I don't want to hear no more about it!"

Will walked soberly on.

Now Mary and the mate dropped behind, for they were really getting acquainted. They compared methods of making corn-bread and then Mary wanted to know if the mate cared for roast blackbirds. Well, the mate had never tried them. Squirrel? Oh yes! Now, did she raise hogs? Well, Mary's mother had this place, eighteen miles down-river, and she and Mary each kept a hog there. They didn't have to feed them; they just let them forage for pecans in the woods.

"Them pigs ain't seen sign o' slop since they been pigs," said Mary.

She had been dressing hogs every year since she was fourteen, when she and Will married each other, but last year was the first time she had done the killing, herself. And it was a dirty job! But she got two more buckets of lard out of hers this time than her mother did. And they'd been living ever since off the meat she'd salted.

Presently there was an opening in the woods. Then Mary was positive that if we'd come the way she wanted to we should have got here in half the time. The shillalah was no longer a threat, it was a certainty. We walked over a small levee, perhaps built by some planter who had lived here a long time ago, into a field. Across it we could see a few dreary negro cabins, and then a rather nondescript white house, set high up off the ground.

The house looked oddly familiar and the skipper asked Will if the river flowed anywhere near where it stood.

"Sure, right below. Won't be long now, matter of fact, before they'll have to move the house again, river's cuttin' so at the bank. Jest did move it back a piece, about a year ago, but they're fixin' to move it again. River sure is eatin' away that man's land."

Well, then we knew. It was the same house. It was the one that had looked so good to us from the river that stormy afternoon—when was it?—day before yesterday. We had wanted to make a landing here, but passed it by because of the sheer cutting bank. All day yesterday, then, and part of the day before, we had

only been fighting our way around one big bend, and now we had walked across the neck of it in an hour or so. The river had strange ways.

The cabins were bleak and wretched. But dark faces appeared at the windows as we passed, and here and there a knot of little children stopped playing and stood to stare. For Mary this was a social occasion, passing the negro cabins. She called to Ole Henry and Aunt Mattie, in a gay, friendly voice; she lingered to gossip with an incredibly old Aunt Viny, who owned the only cow on the island.

It was the back of the big white house that we approached, and we walked up a long flight of steps to the kitchen door. This was a strange bare kitchen, with high-water marks two feet up from the floor around all the walls, and great open cracks in the plaster—the result of moving the building, we supposed. Uncle Robert, white-haired and rheumatic, bowed the shadow of a tottering bow, mumbled indistinguishable syllables, and made way for us to meet Mr. Epstein.

Mr. Epstein was seated at the kitchen table, where dinner was about to be served him. He wore high walking-boots and a flannel shirt; a hunting-cap was hooked on the back of his chair.

Uncle Robert brought chairs for us and went back to his stove to lay a pan of biscuits in the oven. He was about to leave us, but Mr. Epstein called him back.

"This is the only fire we keep in the house," he explained. "Nigger'd freeze. . . . Robert, you can stay here in the room."

It was a desolate house. There had been no attempt to make it habitable; the rooms above were closed.

Downstairs, there was an army cot in the parlor, khaki blankets thrown roughly over it. Where fireplaces had been, there were jagged gaps. All the walls were cracked.

"And I have to move it again this spring," Mr. Epstein said. "Old Man River. He's stealin' my land."

Mr. Epstein of Cincinnati had accepted this island plantation, sight unseen, in a trade for a warehouse in Dayton, Ohio, he told us. He took it only because of the timber, virgin cottonwood, that stood on it. Millions of feet must be gotten out. And when that was done he was through with the land. No, he didn't care to cultivate.

The niggers? Well, they'd always been here. They were left over from the old days. The place had changed hands many times since the Civil War, but they always stayed, working for each new master in turn. Well, they couldn't get away. First place, they didn't have any boats. Second place—he laughed—and this was more important, they were in debt. When the plantation was in running order they would get in debt to the store for tools, clothes, syrup, whatever they needed. When it was not, the debt stood over for the next purchaser.

Himself, he'd taken over considerable, he didn't like to think how much. They were working it out now; not that he'd ever get all the work out of them that they owed! They weren't much good in the lumber operations. Most of them were too old to be good for anything, even cotton-growing, which was supposed to be their trade. They were just so much dead timber. All except old Robert, here. He used to be the butler, in

the old days. House servants for generations, Robert's family. And he sure knew how to make biscuits! But the rest of them—well, that was the way it was in the South. As soon as Mr. Epstein got his timber out he was through with this God-forsaken neck of the woods!

We went into the store-room and made our selection. Milk, soup, and prunes. Mary bought a package of gum.

Will and Mary came down to dinner on the shanty-boat the night before we left; and it was a sort of party, for the skipper made the fluffiest hot cakes he knew how to make. Mary was silent for the first minute or two, looking around. But presently she began to ask about the things she didn't understand.

There was something folded flat against the wall behind a door.

"Oh, that. That's just a bridge table," said the mate.

Mary was silent.

"A table to play cards on, Mary," Will explained. Then the mate was embarrassed. But when we opened it up and used it, we played their games, at which they were considerably cleverer then we were—for there was little or nothing but fan-tan and twenty-one to occupy evenings on the island—and so every one was happy again.

Then the mate started some fudge, and Mary leaned in the kitchen doorway to watch. Presently she spoke:

"Once we had some chocolate. Once when Will went to Vicksburg with a load for a man, a couple of years ago, he brought me home some. And gee! we had

candy every day for a week, then! He went to work every mornin' with his pockets full of it."

All of them were up early and at the water's edge to see us off in the morning.

"Write me a letter," said Mary.

Will and Charlie held the lines, and small John, Mary's boy, helped too. The baby waved a fist from the other woman's arms. Mary was skipping about, bossing every one.

Then we shook hands all around. Somehow we felt that we had known them longer; longer than these few quiet days. And we knew that the island would be lonely after the Ark was out of sight.

We pushed away.

"Write to me; you-all write me a letter!" Mary called.

The shanty-boat headed into the stream and the river shimmered tranquilly before us.

Chapter XXV

DOWN BY THE LANDING

A CURIOUS little procession was moving over the field as the Ark drew close. Four solemn women, wearing feathered and ribboned hats uniformly pulled too far over their foreheads, full cotton blouses, and long billowing skirts, and each of them carrying a rifle somewhat in the manner of an umbrella, walked toward the woods. Perhaps they came from the fisher colony.

For surely that was what this was. Six low shanty-boats lay peacefully together on the outside of the bend, and instead of being pulled out and set on crossed pilings, ignominiously safe like the many we had seen, they were actually in the water and meant for business.

The Ark slipped easily in at the end of the line, quite close. Close enough to exchange greetings with a face which appeared in a window of the neighboring boat. It belonged to a girl of twenty-five or so, who had her yellow hair in hard little braids wound many times around her head.

Her father came along presently, with a nimble little boy of perhaps nine. They took our lines and told us the best places to drive stakes.

The skipper observed that this looked like an old steamboat landing.

"It is an old steamboat landin'; that's jest what it is," the man told us. "This here is old St. Jo's landing. The warehouse washed away in the 'twenty-seven high water, though, and they never have rebuilt it."

He took the skipper off up the road, to show him the town of St. Joseph, which now was a mile from the river. Long ago it had been flush with the bank, he explained, but the river had built up all this land in front of it. That was the way the river did—stole from Peter, paid Paul, all the time.

The youngster, Clifford, remained with the mate. He wanted to be sure he was not in the way. An extremely courteous little boy, but he carried a deadly pair of brass knuckles in his pockets, to protect him in his fights. The gang at school had it in for him because he lived on the river. They called him a river-rat. Couldn't anybody call him a river-rat and get away with it!

He was planning to be a pilot when he grew up, and so the teacher had lent him some books about the Steamboat Boys. Mark Twain? No, he had never heard of him. Grew up to be a pilot, did he? Well, what was the name of the book, please, ma'am?

Clifford could sing. Did the mate wish to hear him? Well . . . In a frail quaver there came out of him a ballad about poor Little Marion Parker, the victim of William Hickman, in a great many verses. Afterward, a ballad about poor Floyd Collins, who died in the cave, in more verses.

Everything he had read was just as true in his eyes as these sad episodes, and consequently he lived in a rather fearsome world. He had lately read "Uncle

Tom's Cabin" and did not differentiate between it and what he found in the newspapers; except, of course, that the book was about the "olden times."

"Times have changed, ma'am," he sighed. "Old South ain't like that any more."

His father was a fisherman by trade, and his sisters also had spent a good deal of time fishing. They still helped during school vacations. But he was fixin' to be a river pilot, he was.

When the skipper came home Clifford said it was his supper-time, thanked us politely, and marched solemnly out. Once on the bank, he dashed furiously over to the boat where he lived.

The last of our dinner dishes had just been wiped when we heard a rumble on the front porch. A lantern shone out there and a trail of three others were coming toward us over the mud bank. The shanty-boat colony had come to call!

Clifford's father came, and his two sisters; the boy was at home with his spelling. There came an old man who chewed dubiously at a yellowed mustache and wore a wooden leg. And the women of the hats and the blouses, whom we had seen in the afternoon. Peering from behind the skirts of one of the old ladies was a dark-eyed, timid youngster with a queer little speech defect. The old lady sat close by the stove.

Every one else began to find places to sit, and in this shuffling, somewhat embarrassed interval the shanty-boat seemed close and heavy with expectant, curious people. There was a faint odor of fish about the room, of tobacco and burning kerosene, and of old men and women. The lamp shone sharp across one face, more

softly over another, and buried others in doubtful shadow. From one of these unknown faces in the half-darkness there came now a cough, and a remark—about the stage of the river—and it was not clear who had spoken. The skipper passed his tobacco-can around, and things were better. There was a general crossing of knees, and easing farther down into chairs, as the men puff-puffed at their pipes.

Only one of the shanty-boat colony, besides Clifford, had stayed at home. This was the mother of Clifford and the two girls, and it was her turn at the evening paper. She'd had to stay home and read about the trial of Ada Le Boeuf the murderess. She had begged to be excused.

Abruptly, then, the girl with the braids, from her bright spot beside the table, began to talk. She was telling how the fish had been running this winter. They'd had pretty fair hauls, hadn't they? She turned to her sister, a girl who, once too often, perhaps, had been told she was pretty, for she was turning her head back and forth now, easy, slow, all in the conversation, showing how she looked at the various angles. The two girls had their future occupations all picked out, we found. Both were still in high school, but the elder was going to study to be a nurse and the pretty one was to teach school. She preened her hair.

"'Shcuse me," simpered the old lady by the stove, speaking for the first time. She got up and lifted one of the lids. "I gotta shpit." She spat into the stove and the hot coals sizzled.

The solemn girl went on about a fight she'd had with a large Buffalo fish during the Christmas holiday.

A dirty critter. See, she put her hand down to reach up a cork and the old Buffalo he swung around with one of his fins, mad as a hornet, and broke open the hide of her hand. She showed us the scar it had left, uneven and still a little puffy. One by one she showed each of us.

The father pulled deliberately at his pipe and glanced around the room.

"Down-river bound, eh?" he mused. "Well, y'all want to watch sharp for twin eddy, down beyond Natchez a piece. Down below Natchez is twin eddy, and you want to peel your eye for that. I hear tell o' some mighty serious disasters, down along by twin eddy. You gotta steer a sharp course between them two."

"Yes, so they tell me," said the skipper. For wherever we went they warned us about some danger that lay just below. That was the way of the river. It might be all right here at home, where you could get used to it, but you went a little way below and there were dangers waiting to wreck you. Ole Debbil Ribber.

"So you're from the North," the father went on. "Well, my people are all up there. Used to live up-country, myself, days gone by. Used to live up in Arkansas."

"Oh yes. Well, we started in St. Paul."

"Yeah? Away up there in St. Paul. . . . A good piece above us."

"Pretty good. Yes, we've come a long way down. Come from the head of navigation, as a matter of fact."

"Head of navigation? You do say! Well, I reckon

that's a good piece up the river, all right. A good long piece." He stirred in his chair. "Ole Mississippi sure do run through a lot o' country, all right."

We had a curious feeling that all that country we had passed through, up above, was somehow piling on our heads. There was an oppressive sense that all of those States—Arkansas and Missouri, and then Iowa and Minnesota, and those on the other side—were crowded on top of us. Now we thought this man, also, was feeling obscurely the weight of so much country.

"Shcuse me," simpered the old lady, rising to bend over the stove, and the red coals sizzled once more. She sat down again with a snicker.

"You went hunting this afternoon," said the mate, turning to her. "I thought I saw you starting off."

"Blackbirds," the old lady replied. "You like a li'l blackbird?"

"Yes, I do," said the mate, readily. "I like a blackbird with a little bacon."

"Well, I don't like a blackbird. 'Tain't enough meat on the li'l devils. 'Tain't enough meat on they bones. Now, I like a meadow-lark. I like me a nice pretty li'l ole lark. But folks has been shootin' at 'em so much they're right timid. Bacon with him, you say? No, I ain't never tried him with bacon."

She pulled her little silent boy upon her lap, but almost immediately she had to set him down on the floor again and bend over the stove.

"Shcuse me," she mumbled, grinning at all of us in the dim circle.

They urged us to stay over to-morrow. The man with the wooden leg said that the *Tennessee Belle* was

expected to dock then, and the pilot sometimes invited them aboard while she was unloading, to hear the radio.

"Or if the *Belle* is held up and she don't make it to-morrow," said the girl with the braids, "we'll play our graphophone for you, on our boat."

Chapter XXVI

WHAT WAS LEFT

THE grinding coach wheels of centuries, and before them the feet of Indians, had worn down the soft road so deep that its embankments were above our heads. We looked up at the ponderous roots of live-oaks. Beyond, the sky glittered through a gray lace of branches dripping Spanish moss, so that it was almost a tunnel the automobile carried us through.

From a cloud of dust ahead there emerged a neat black gig completely overshadowed by a plush parasol, maroon without, cream-colored within, and swinging a long creamy fringe about the heads of a prim old lady and gentleman.

"Evenin', evenin', y'all!" Nods, bows passed between us.

It was a friendly, warm-hearted world, in which all of us seemed to be neighbors. For, coming here to Natchez, we had slipped back into another century, and almost, we felt, into its ways. Of course there was no hurrying along this road. When another automobile came along, one of us drew up close under the embankment to give the other room to pass. But this was not often, for people here preferred to drive a horse.

Now and then there was an opening at the side of the road, where a driveway led back over a sunny lawn

and swung into a grove of magnolias, far from the road, to the white pillars, the red roof, in their midst. We lingered occasionally by these driveways to stare back into the places where people still seemed to live in a style of the remote past.

With our Natchez friends we had, earlier in the afternoon, called at one old town home. It was nearly four o'clock and we supposed they would be risen from table; for here the custom of dining every day at three had not been disturbed.

Everything about the house was tremendous. Walking between the great pillars and across the gallery, we knew something of the days in which it was built, the days of expansiveness and leisure. Economy was unheard of, in the prosperous times before the Civil War, efficiency undreamed of. To connive to save a little space here and a little there, in the planning of a home, in that open-handed world bespoke a picayunish mind.

You could have rolled a coach and four through the front doorway and down through the broad reception hall that ran, fan-light to fan-light, across the house. The giant hinges, the lock, and the tremendous key could have been melted down into a dowry of silver dollars.

We sat in the long drawing-room opening from the hall, upon yellow brocaded chairs surmounted with walnut rosebuds, and we conversed with a lady in black taffeta, slightly rusted at the creases, and a gentleman in a frock-coat just a little frayed at the cuffs.

"I know you must be enjoying the river," said the lady. "Great-grandfather loved it so. They had lived

in Virginia, you see. But they had a schooner built and he brought his family and some of the slaves. They started down the Ohio, and then came down the Mississippi. And they had so much fun! Every night they visited at a different plantation. Grandmother used to tell me. Of course she was only a child, but she remembered. They loved the life on the river."

Then with the friends who introduced us they spoke of births, of illnesses, and finally of a recent death in the neighborhood.

"Must say I was sorry to see the old fellow go," said our host. "Sorry to see him go off."

"But Malcolm, he was so unkind to his mother!" his wife protested gently.

"You mean about the roof. Well, he was always a stubborn soul. The more the neighbors interfered with him, the less inclined he felt to give in. I don't know that that old roof leaked so badly as they say. And you see, the old lady survives him. No, my dear, I can't say that I approve of the way that roof situation was handled. I didn't like it when the neighbors took the matter in their own hands. 'Twas no concern of theirs."

We learned that the gentleman so lately dead had had over his house a roof that leaked in nearly every room and had done so as long as any one could remember. Pitying the gentleman's mother, an aged lady believed to suffer from rheumatism, his neighbors urged him to put on a new roof. He declined. He said the roof had been good enough for his father, for his grandfather before him. And there continued to be puddles in the rooms when it rained, until at last a

group of neighbors ordered roofing and sent it out to his house with a crew to lay it on. The crew had peculiar orders, however. They were to cover all of the house except one part, which they were to leave just as it was, as it had always been. That was over the master's room. So it remained.

But now we were on the country road, looking for a grand old mansion. We turned off presently to a narrow, vague trail of ruts that seemed to be leading over barren hills. It wound a haphazard course into the backwoods, passing an occasional tar-paper shack, and once a startling little cottage in a new coat of paint, with a flower garden all around, looking very lonely in this waste, then on again over uncultivated hills.

At last we saw a grove of live-oaks, heavy with moss, standing upon a plateau, and dim buildings among them. This was the plantation house and all these wild acres we had passed through since we left the main road must have been the plantation. But it was a long time since any one had planted cotton here. The land had been abandoned, to go its own way. And from where we were it looked as if the same fate had befallen the house.

Indeed, it seemed impossible that we were at the journey's end, for we knew that people still lived in the house we were looking for, and these were ruins. Three great oak-trees lay zigzagged across the house and under them the roofing had given way. The trees must be resting their weight on the beams themselves. But this was the back of the house.

We drove around, and we saw what once had been

a very beautiful place. Even in decay the justice and charm of the design were there; it had been beautiful. There was not much window-glass left, and over the pillars one cornice had broken away. One of the pillars had split and seemed about to fall, paint was peeling from all of them. But somehow it was still beautiful.

It was frightening, also, and we walked very slowly up the steps. A little old lady came to the door and our friends introduced us. The hall was dark and bare, but from the shadows there swept up before us one of those amazing old circular staircases. Self-supporting, they rise alone and apart from the wall, miracles of architects long dead. Apparently one did not use this one any more, for the steps were laden with books and papers and knicknacks.

It was dark in the living-room, too, and rather chilly, for in the absence of glass the blinds all were closed, and coming in from the sunny afternoon we found it hard at first to see anything but the fire glowing at the other end. Two tall shadows rose from before it. They were the other sisters who lived here.

They were so glad to see us! Making places before the coal fire, they told our friends it was good of them to call, for the place was so hard to reach; and to bring us, the visitors.

One of the ladies, the youngest of the three, pulled her shawl tight across her shoulders and whispered anxiously, "Is it cold out?" For in the dark living-room the fire gave little warmth.

But no, the mate said, it was a pleasant day to-day. The sun was shining very bright.

"Ah," said the old lady, unconvinced.

"I am sorry you had to drive in by the back way," remarked the eldest. "You see, the proper approach is through the alley of cedars. Lover's Lane, we used to call it! Very pretty, too. But the creek swelled up one spring and washed the bridge away, and so we can't use that road any more."

Some one spoke of the house, which was so very old and still so lovely.

"Not any more," she replied firmly. "No, 'tain't beautiful any more. If you could have seen it when I was a girl you would have thought 'twas handsome. I hate to have you come and see it like this. But what can we do? There aren't any good craftsmen these days, and I can't call in the ordinary bungling carpenter and put him to work *here*. Some day perhaps I'll find a good craftsman. . . . And the rugs, too! I do hate to have you come here with all the rugs up."

We looked around. Our eyes were becoming accustomed to the dim light and we noticed now that there were indeed no rugs except for a small scrap before the hearth.

"You know what happened to them, don't you? You know where our rugs are? Well, I'll tell you! It was in the carpet-bag days. After the war, you know, the men of the family didn't come back for some time, some of them never. . . . Well! So the niggers came rampaging into the house. They weren't afraid *then*. They took all the rugs up, and I don't know what else. Made quilts for their beds, I guess, out of our rugs! That's where they are."

You would have said the Civil War was last week. It had been, perhaps, a long time since any one had

come to see the old ladies in the remote plantation house, for they seemed glad to talk openly and they were courageous, almost gay about the circumstances of their life. It seemed that disaster had succeeded disaster for so long now that they had accepted the futility of holding out; and as each new calamity occurred they adapted their lives accordingly. Window-glass broke and they closed the blinds, the stairway threatened to give way and they ceased to go up. But in this acceptance of the inevitable no spirit was broken. Indeed, there was a touch of bravado about them.

The bad year of the boll-weevil had ruined one entire cotton crop and scarcely any planting had been done since then. They still owned the whole plantation, a matter of thousands of acres, and there had been several offers to buy the land, but their father had urged them never to sell it and sell they wouldn't.

Meanwhile, life was interesting. They had their surrey and two of them drove to Natchez once a week to do a little marketing and to learn the news. This was always the best part, especially when it concerned aviation. They gloried in Lindbergh and in their remote decaying home they had solemnly blessed his marriage. Once a plane had flown directly over the house and they had all run out to watch until it was a speck against the horizon. Perhaps some day they would have a chance to fly.

There were many things for them to do. One of them had discovered a deposit of Indian arrow-heads on the place and was gradually making a collection. Another had recently found that the soft sandstone in

the bed of the creek was good to work with. Using one of the flinty arrow-heads for a chisel, she had been cutting out shapes of fruits and flowers. There were some of them on the table in the center of the room. Indeed, we saw now that the table was piled with sandstone pears and apples, grapes, bananas.

They began to show us some of their things—those that were left. For the most part these were relics of a day of high activity, of travel among families in the South, in Canada, and abroad. The Natchez planter with his wife and children had entertained diplomats, statesmen, and belles in this fair house; coaches were always rumbling over the bridge through Lover's Lane, in those days. Egg-nogs, juleps, and toddies were passed around on the broad gallery; a negro in starched linen handed a stirrup-cup to the planter's son from over the ridge when the young man passed through. In turn, they had journeyed about, for whole winters at a time, visiting their friends and relatives.

They showed us a certificate bearing an enormous seal, which hung framed upon the wall. It testified that the sisters were descended from an anointed king. Beside it was the miniature of an eighteenth-century ancestress, daughter of a Welsh earl. And while we were about it, one of them reached under the sofa and pulled out a gaping portfolio coated with dust. It contained state papers, belonging to a late grand-uncle who had been a member of one of the early cabinets of the republic. She shoved them back under again.

A tiny rosewood piano with a golden seal embedded in the lid stood against the wall. It had won a prize in Paris a century ago. The elder sister sat down, lifted

the lid, and glanced down at the keys. They were blackened, streaked, and broken.

"The rats," she explained. "They are always at the ivory, you know."

She ran her fingers over the keys and the soft clear tones, each one just a little wrong, just a little out of tune with the next, stumbled down the scale. Then she threw her head back and began to play.

It was half a hymn, half a march. Whatever it was, it picked you up and swung you down a riotous path. And always, everything it said was just a little distorted, muddied because the piano was warped. Unaware, she finished with a tempest of chords and flourished her hands. Her cheeks were flushed under the rouge.

"A little thing I composed," she explained, "during the last war. I call it 'Kill the Kaiser'!"

Driving through the wreck of their plantation we were silent, disturbed, unable to shake off the atmosphere of living decay. Yet the three old sisters—we were not quite sure that they knew of the slow encroachment of annihilation upon them. Did they ever ask themselves whether they or the stalwart old oak beams of their house, bowed under the weight of the fallen trees, would live the longer? More than likely they did not, very often. For wasn't there always another Indian arrow-head to discover at the base of the old cistern, and wasn't there an inexhaustible supply of sandstone in the creek-bed to carve into the shapes of fruit? And the world was moving all the time to more amazing achievements to speculate about. If, meanwhile, disaster upon disaster befell them, it

was, after all, a slow process, and they had learned to adapt themselves to the fate almost unconsciously and with dignity of a kind. You could imagine the youngest shrugging a shoulder at the oak-trees across the roof and murmuring to herself, "No matter. It is no matter."

The late afternoon seemed somehow clearer and fresher when we went with our friends to their own Elgin Plantation. Coming from the North, the Thornton Greens had bought this ancient place about fifteen years before and had been making a working farm of its rolling acreage. Now it had just been brought through another opulent harvest; cotton and corn had been reaped, tons of pecans and black walnuts had been shipped to market.

The driveway circled a lawn where straight moss-hung trees stood wide apart, before the house. Below the drive there had been, when the Greens first came, an almost impenetrable tangle of growth. But cautious pruning had revealed eventually the pattern of an old garden, long ago left to go its own way. Remnants of a boxwood hedge made a faint tracery of ellipses, hearts, and stars. There were hoary japonicas and roses. Now, slowly, they were bringing it back to its old elaborate formality.

The wide house itself was a very old one, a part of it dating pretty well back into the eighteenth century. And it was while its new residents were examining the upper rafters of this oldest part that they made the discovery which they had brought us here to see. Year by year they had been inspecting parts of the building

to see if any of the beams and supports needed repair. Under the attic floor recently they had come upon a strange find. Tucked in between the tremendous beams, scattered through heaps of dust and plaster and rags, and bulging from the cracks, there were letters and documents.

Stiff, crackling, faded papers they were. There was not much left of them, for the rats which had carried them into this hiding-place through the past century or so had eaten great holes in the paper; holes neatly scalloped with tooth-marks. Rain from a leaky roof had washed out the yellowed ink in blotches, dust was deeply smudged over the outside pages.

Still, something remained. And as we strained our eyes over the dim papers, one after another, we knew what the people had been like, those long-ago people who had lived and died here before our mothers were born. Some were letters received by the residents of Elgin from their neighbors and their kinsfolk at a time when travel was difficult and correspondence flourished. Rough drafts of business notes, of letters to the editor, of military instructions, of household accounts had been saved in this attic. There was a "report and manifest" of the cargo brought in February, 1803, by the keel-boat *Fena,* signed by the X of Visante Ernados, its master, who could not write his name. The echo of a political controversy that seemed to have disturbed much of the Mississippi Valley in 1798 came back to us from a crumbling double sheet of heavy paper badly ravaged by rats, addressed by Captain Shaumburgh of Natchitoches, Louisiana, to Dr. John F. Carmichael, near Natchez.

Dear Sir,

It was the first time that I learned from your letter of the 20th October that my name was mentioned occasionally in the Political, or rather, Scandalous Squabbles of the day, and a few days after the receipt of your letter, I saw a Paper which contained my friend Tommy Sterret's pretty letter to Don Daniel. The long tonged and ill contrived Man speaks at randum, and from hear say. Could I persuade myself for a moment to believe that I had been so silly and imprudent as to shew my instructions (as he said I did) I would never forgive myself the indiscretion. Yes I would swear on the holy . . . to the best of my belief I have not committed such an error, that he has asserted things from conjecture only. . . .

There follows a tantalizing reference to conspiracy in the upper valley, of which we cannot quite make sense. The rain and the rats have been here before us. Only there is the assertion that some one named Powers "should not be at Liberty . . . through the Illinoise or Kaskaskys. . . ." He continues:

. . . could have sent Powers out of the county from different motives. And I do deny that I have made use of the 'Borish word' . . .

The sale of Negroes is but slow in this county. Cash you can not get for them, you must sell for Cotton. . . .

Yours with friendship,
WM. SHAUMBURGH.

In a most precise tiny script a gentleman who signed himself "Q. E. D." addressed to the editor of the "Mississippi Gazette" his contribution to the dispute over the true sovereignty of the territory, whether Spanish, British, or American. There was no date. The paper was much interlined and no doubt it was a later, cleaner copy that eventually found its way into the editorial office. But we shall never know what he believed, be-

cause the rats have made off with the best part of his argument.

A Natchez planter who had gone up to Charleston to buy negroes off the ships wrote home:

I have been awaiting the arrival of several Ships which are daily expected. There was but a few slaves at market when I arrived, & those few the refuse of Cargoes. I am desirous of obtaining good slaves, I shall therefore wait with all the patience I am capable of for a new supply in the market. I think I shall be able to make our purchase of choice slaves, unless a great number of ships which are looked for should be lost, at 280 Dollars.

He continues on general topics:

We have had no European News here. I begin to fear Bonaparte has published an edict against the exportation of News. . . . I have consolation to inform you that Gun Boat No. 1 is here in warlike preparation, ready to spread destruction among the ships of our enemies.

This was April 19, 1804.

A document giving Josiah Winchester of Natchez authority to purchase five hundred bales of cotton, "the products of the country within the lines of Military Occupation" by the Union Army in February, 1864, had been preserved, as well as a description of a plantation of five hundred acres offered to a Mr. Linton for sixty thousand dollars, with all its buildings: "a Dwelling house thirty-five feet square," kitchen and outbuildings, a cotton-gin and press-house, oxen, mules, horses, cattle, poultry, and eighty-four slaves.

Then a crumbling brown scrap of paper testified:

Know all men by these presents that I have this day sold a yallow woman slave by the name of Sally Archer for the

compensation of Eight hundred dollars, the receipt of which I hereby acknowledge, which woman I warrant sound and free from the diseases which the law proscribes, and the claims of all persons whatsoever. Given under my hand at Natchez this 22. day of April, 1819.

Wm. Fulcher.

From remote and primitive Columbia, in northern Louisiana, George S. Whitehill was writing to his friend John C. Jenkins, of the family at Elgin, who was now off at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania. This was November 28, 1827.

I have been waiting with no small degree of anxiety for the arrival of Mr. Mayer's oration; but hitherto my solicitude has been unrelieved. It would be no trifling disappointment, were I not to obtain a copy of it; as I consider it such a production as is not every day to be met with, whether we regard the thing itself (which must, on all hands, be allowed to be a dainty treat) or the dress in which it is served up to us. I conjure you therefore to redeem your promise and in the midst of such a profusion of food for the mental appetite, be not insensible to the condition of us poor unfortunates, who are not permitted to inhale the exhilerating atmosphere of science nor suffered to live beneath that blaze of intellectual light which vivifies while it illustrates your favored town, but are compelled to plod on our tiresome way without the light or consolation of literature.

I hope that this note may reopen our correspondence; the next letter, of consequence, comes from you. I would write more were it possible. The mail is just closing.

And yet, no matter how hard it was to travel or how slow the post, these plantation people kept in touch with their kin, and with the affairs of the world. Mrs. H. F. Olmsted was writing to a Natchez niece from her home in Princeton on March 5, 1849. First she thanked Nanny for gifts sent from the plantation

and discussed with her certain recently published romances, "sweet things, written in the old English style," which might be welcome in return. And then:

Your young friend Sam Alexander is, I think, laying close seige to Kate Stockton, and I do not think it at all unlikely that if he perseveres, he may in the end succeed. She certainly speaks very kindly of him, and he is very intimate with her brothers, and with all the family. He is settled as a Clergyman at a place near Philadelphia, and they say is a good Preacher and doing good among his people. She is just calculated for a Clergyman's Wife. Has no taste whatever for Society, and is a fine, religious girl, without being very attractive. The Commodore is too busy digging Gold in Virginia to concern himself about what is going on at home. He is there almost all of the time, and expects to turn everything into gold that belongs to him.

This is a big day in Washington. We, as a family, are quite represented there. The Hunters, Mary Stockton, Cousin Mary Harrison & c., are all among the "distinguished Guests" forming part of General Taylor's suit. Maria Hunter (Cousin David's Wife you know) had her dress all arranged here for the inauguration ball, which takes place this evening. It was a crimson velvet, low neck, short sleeves, &c., with a kind of turban of lace worked in gold I think, and ornamented with Feathers. Our friend Mrs. Rittenhouse made the dress. But I expect it will be of little consequence what one wears after they get there. They say the crowd will be tremendous.

Mother has just come in and sends much love to you. She was very much pleased with the black silk stockings. I was only fearful that they would give her a violent cold, as she was bent upon putting them right on, and wearing them. I persuaded her at last to wait until the weather became a little warmer. . . .

Indeed, those were times when a lady or a gentleman sat down to devote a long evening to the composition of a letter to a friend or cousin. When Dr. William Dunbar left his Natchez place with his wife, to

visit their son at Princeton College, he was sending back a constant flow of correspondence, describing what he had seen and whom he had met with, commenting upon the quality of the Rev. Mr. Breckinridge's sermon in Baltimore, and the method employed to instruct his son. An equally full flow from the neighbors at home seems to have followed him on his journey. Only a few were dilatory. At the conclusion of the third closely filled page addressed from Philadelphia on July 7, 1843, to John Jenkins, at Elgin, he wrote:

> Give my love to Mr. Baldwin—that correspondent of correspondents! Tell him I am in his debt some 3 or 4 long letters—and that last night, at Princeton, I actually recd. his last letter of the 23. June which must have come here on greased lightning. Give my love to Mr. Ogden and tell him I got his very agreeable letter & made Doctor Miller laugh not a little at his acct. of the blowing to pieces of the papacy in our neighborhood by Mr. Stanton's big gun. Tell Willie I have never recd. a line from him since I left home. I have written him one letter & should have written more if he had encouraged me with half a page only. Give my love to him however, & tell him I mourn over his bad health. What is the matter with him? His constitution is a stout one naturally —and left off smoking too—there must be some new self-management in him, or he will never get well & become a distinguished man. . . .

Chapter XXVII

VILLAGE WINDOWS

WE tied in the mouth of little Bayou Sara and walked over the sand-bar that was piled up at the river-front of the dying village. The skipper was carrying a camera and the mate a tripod, for from our windows as we landed we had seen the columns and spires of another little village, St. Francisville, clambering over the bluff a mile or so inland, and this ought to be good for pictures.

At the ferry landing, a thin drooping old man had been watching us from under the torn brim of his hat. Now he came over and fell into step.

"Shootin' futures?" he inquired, with a professional kind of nod toward the camera.

We didn't quite understand, but he went on, looking wise:

"Well, I can see you're new to this town, so I'll give y'all a tip. Ain't never worked this town before, has you? Well, now, they was a fellow pulled in here with a house-boat same as y'all's, six months ago, except he didn't have no engine, he jest follered the current. Well, he was shootin' futures about a week here and he done a land-office business. Tell you where he set up his box. You'll see a hotel, up the hill there, in St. Francisville. Turn right and you can't miss it. Drug-

store on the corner. Well, that's where the two main streets comes together and that's where you'll find the crowds. Tell me they got quite a crop o' future wives and intendeds up there since the last fellow was here, too. Y'all ought to make a clean-up."

Now we knew what it was to shoot futures. The skipper denied the soft impeachment:

"Oh, no, we're just going to take some pictures for fun. For ourselves. Houses and streets and things like that."

Our benefactor looked us over with profound doubt, and then, we thought, with a new suspicion—the kind that is oftenest expressed by tapping a finger at the temple. If we were ashamed of our calling, why did we carry its instruments about so openly?

To relieve the situation the skipper pointed to a house set cockeyed across its own path and asked how this had happened.

Still offended, our friend coldly explained that this had happened during the last high flood. The house had been lifted from the ground by the water, dragged a few yards, and set down crooked. Matter o' fact—he was beginning to warm to the subject—pretty well all o' Bayou Sara had been wrecked that time. Used to be a right smart little village down here clustered about the landin', but there was nothin' much left to show for it now. The water come right up over the bar and run into the houses. Mattresses and chairs floated away, along with chickens and a couple o' cats. Hadn't anybody had the heart to do any buildin' since that time and most of 'em was movin' uphill to St. Francisville or making off down-river. Pretty soon they

wouldn't be hardly a soul left down here but the ferry pilot, and he'd have to shift for himself. . . .

It was an abject huddle of shacks and shanties, down here by the bar. High-water marks showed on all of the buildings and two or three were caved in at the side, the roofs sunk, and abandoned where they stood. Here and there a washing hung out behind one of the wretched dwellings that had somehow survived, but a rowboat lay among the weeds beside the back stoop, waiting for the river to come up again.

The only building that looked unharmed was a tall two-story structure of wood, unpainted like the shanties but set on much higher pilings than they were. It might have been a store, but on the lintel it bore the emblem of a lodge. Perhaps the villagers had found shelter in their lodge when the water ran over their yards and rose up through the floors and walls.

Our friend paused here and said good-by. Perhaps he was the grand master of this lodge. We were turning to go, when he stopped us. He was shaking his finger.

"You put up that there box where I told you and you'll do business!"

We laughed in his face and walked up the hill. The little bayou in the mouth of which our boat was tied had been following the road, but it was invisible behind its own small levee. The road began to sheer up into the other town now and there were steps for the pedestrians, but a horse or a mule would have to make the best of it. Above us, roofs shone from among the trees in ridges along the bluff-side and here and there a row of columns or a pair of steeples stood revealed

where the branches parted. The road turned and became a street; and from this corner you could stand and look down on the poor little town of Bayou Sara, left behind, and the broad indifferent river curving below.

The little bayou itself had followed us and was winding lazily through St. Francisville. We lingered on its levee, watching the slow water wind under the bridge, and half wondered if it wouldn't be a good idea to bring the Ark back here and stay a while. It might be pleasant to linger in St. Francisville.

It was easy to think of being happy here longer than that—forever, perhaps. This was not only a substantial little community but a very old and beautiful one. High on the bluff, it was safe from the river, safe from the disaster that had wrecked the little landing-town below. Most of the houses were painted white and stood close by the walk and clusters of red and white japonica were blooming by the doorways. It was January, but the japonicas were blooming like drops of blood and snow among dark leaves and the lawns were intensely green. Palmettos, the first we had ever seen, sprouted bushy at the street corners.

We found our way into a strange little churchyard, so still and dark that we spoke in whispers. The graves had been dug in a grove of live-oaks and the trees made a dense roof of branches and silver moss over them, shutting out the sun. Here too were great full bushes of waxy japonica, blooming red and white everywhere. In one corner, a little apart, stood a stone church, built one hundred and two years ago.

Many of the people who been lying in this cool place

The old churchyard at St. Francisville

so many years had come from England. "Born in Cornwall," "Born in Sussex," said the headstones. But all of those more lately dead were born in West Feliciana Parish.

Twilight was coming as we walked slowly down the street again, peering at the quiet old houses. It would be easy to be happy here. For this was the South, the old, far South. The villagers lived in peaceful ease, untroubled by the challenge of infertile soil and hostile winters. They could relax and enjoy their small, sufficient luxuries, and practise their gracious virtues. We wondered if perhaps that didn't explain what we as Northerners had always imagined to be the romantic unreality of the South. Down here they were not toughened into the stern, hard virtues of New Englanders and upper-valley pioneers; they could relax—that was it—and take their time; and whatever decay had come to some of the planters, these townspeople were holding their own.

As we turned back up the street again, the soft blue dusk was falling and the lamps were being lighted. We passed by a fine old white house, not very large, with a garden at the side and an arbor covered with rose vines. The curtains had not yet been drawn in the dining-room and we paused in the shadow, quite close, to watch as a young black girl in a ruffled apron spread linen upon a walnut table and then turned to the sideboard for glasses and silver. People lived an agreeable life here.

Where the road turned to go down the hill, we stopped and looked at the river below. And perhaps if we had not done that, if we had not lingered there

that moment or two, we would have stayed in St. Francisville for a while. But as we stood there staring at the river we knew we wouldn't do that. For it curved away from the bar in a wide sweep and then lay straight and still for miles ahead, streaked with dull purple shadows and only quickened to gold here and there where shafts of the sinking sun struck the water. We stood there staring at the river, moment by moment watching it flow down the country, and then we knew we'd be going along with it to-morrow.

Chapter XXVIII

BAYOU COOPER

IT was not far from Solitude Light that the main river swung, vast and lazy, around an island, while a straight, private-looking chute ran directly behind it. As a usual thing, it's extremely risky to run a chute unless you know it well, for it may go ambling off on a discursive tour of inspection and, you with it, spend days looking for the river again. Or even if it is a cut-off it is likely to be a nest of snags. This one, though, seemed to have plenty of water and with the glasses we thought we could see where it rejoined the river below.

Leisurely we probed the Louisiana backwater, until we came upon the mouth of a tiny bayou emptying into it. A huge slanting cypress, dripping with moss, all but obscured the opening. As we ran abreast and looked in, any idea of achieving Baton Rouge, or anything else but this, that evening, evaporated. The dreamy little stream was the place for us.

Perhaps, we thought, as we headed the Ark toward the roots of the cypress, we'd stay here a long time. Perhaps forever. It was better than St. Francisville, better than anything else so far.

Now we were turned in and beginning to make fast, we saw that the bayou made a most provocative tunnel between steep little bluffs—steep for delta land—

under drooping trees and scarfs of moss. After penetrating the woods for less than a hundred yards it made a sharp turn and disappeared, and in this dark corner a couple of skiffs were moored. All the better, then. For the skiffs must have owners, who would appear éventually, and from them we would find out means of obtaining supplies. Just the staples, of course. For already we were planning to live like Crusoe and Friday, and the skipper's first occupation, after we were fast, was to clean his gun.

As we looked out from our veranda, over the waters of the chute, that evening, we felt at home. We were off the main river, away from the merest village or dying steamboat landing. We were all alone with the water and the drooping trees and a distant mourning-dove. There was no knowing where we were.

Perhaps it was strange, perhaps not, but by morning we were sure that our changed tempo had made itself felt in the house-boat. Over night it had assumed a domestic air. A mythical folding of hands over a mythical lap had somehow taken place. Having wandered seventeen hundred variegated miles, it had come to a rest now and it wore a sedentary look. Memory of the risky adventures of its impetuous younger days, scars of its tussles with the waves, had been gently put by, had mysteriously become a tale to be told by a peaceful fireside. Snug in its dreamy shelter now, and *safe* no matter how the winds might lash the wide water out there, it had settled down to a comfortable life. So it seemed that morning.

It was quite natural, then, since we had moved in, that we should have a caller presently. He was an

elderly negro, very black, but thin-faced, a little wan and saddened and very kindly. He wore a brown miner's cap, with a small metal clasp to fasten the lamp, but no lamp. We had heard of no mining operations in the delta, but there it was, winking at us in the sun, a couple of inches above his winking teeth.

The formalities of welcome over, we learned that we had taken up our residence in Bayou Cooper. This was somewhere between St. Francisville and Baton Rouge; so much we had known before. There was no store within miles, no habitation but his own, back in the woods; no suh, there wa'n't no road. . . .

Having explained these things to our satisfaction, our friend became a little plaintive. Had we seen his skiff, the red skiff he had tied up there in the turn of the bayou?

We had seen only those two skiffs that were tied there now.

Well, then, them hell-raisin' young uns had slipped off with it again. They jest 'propriated his proppity whenever they was a mind to. Now how was he gwine git over to the island, to look at his traps?

The duty of a new neighbor was plain. The skipper had been intending, since the Ark had settled for a time, to transfer the engine to the *Salamander* for a runabout. With the old man's help he did so now, and then the two of them shot out with a breath-taking spurt into the chute and off toward the island. At first the negro clung tight to the gunwales of the little boat. But gradually it became clear that she would not flash, hell-bent, from under him, and he relaxed. Then slowly the full glory of this unprecedented effortless

speed possessed him. As they neared the island he turned in his seat, waved both arms at the mate, and yelled at the top of his sixty-year lungs.

Next morning he came to see us again, and stood on the runway, fumbling his cap. Finally he asked if we hadn't looked up on the roof yet. Well, no, we hadn't looked on the roof, but we would. There stood a quart bottle of fresh milk and a peck of sweet potatoes. Thanks for the ride!

The skipper brought down a goose that day, to go with the sweet potatoes. We were at breakfast when we saw them swooping by, low over the water. He stood on the porch, behind the half-open screen door, and fired out over the chute. Quickly then the *Salamander* had to be untied and started out after the bird that was floating down-stream.

It turned out to be a strangely downy bird. The skipper established himself on the runway and began to pluck; and nearly an hour later when the mate came out to see, he was still at it and there was a faint path of feathers trailing down the water from our mooring. Still later the situation was little changed, except that now the queue of floating feathers had widened and the skipper, too, was wearing his share.

The mate abandoned the idea of a noonday banquet and proceeded to prepare just an ordinary meal of Spanish rice and asparagus salad. She was setting the table when the skipper, now well thatched with eiderdown, appeared in the doorway. Dragging from one hand was the bird, still pretty well feathered.

"What the hell!" said he, removing a curl of down from his lip. "I'm going to skin this bird."

The girl looked at his despairing face and down at the limp bird, still so very downy, and she hadn't a word to say. So that night we had goose à la quail—dismembered, that is, and all its exposed surfaces tenderly wrapped with strips of bacon in lieu of skin. Perhaps it is in devious ways like this that important culinary discoveries are made. For the memory of goose à la quail will linger succulent upon our palates when sundry pompous Christmas roasts are long forgotten.

We were in clover, now, for a goose lasted several days and was capable of a wide variety of transmutations in the hands of an inventive mate who hadn't had any meat to experiment with in some time. And moreover, after his first generous gesture our negro friend was willing to do a little trading with us. And so, for all the world as if the shanty-boat were moored in some respectable subdivision, we found a quart of milk beside the kitchen door each morning, and now and then a basket of garden vegetables.

There followed warm idle days of prowling in the woods, of nosing with the *Salamander* along the hidden waterway, of browning in the sunlight on a broad, clean sand-bar. . . . Yes! We admitted it right out loud, like that: this was indeed the life.

We were reading tranquilly under open windows, early in the afternoon (hard to believe that this May midday had come in January), when suddenly a strange, sweet sound startled us. Faint, high, and clear a melody drifted. . . . It seemed literally far off in the sky, above the world. We looked at each other. There wasn't a town within thought or a dwelling in

earshot. There was, there could be, only one possibility: a show-boat was steaming up the river.

The next minute we were untying the *Salamander,* and then aboard, flying up-stream in the direction of that shrill remote sound. Oh yes, it was the calliope a show-boat uses to announce that it is coming in to port somewhere; the loud, clear, triumphant calliope that can be heard in all the cabins and plantation houses for miles around.

It was. From the tip of the island we looked down the main channel and there, just nosing into a laborious landing, was a great white steamboat pushing a bigger, bulkier, more glittering white boat before it. We took the glass and on the roof of the Texas deck of the tow saw the calliope itself, with its own little puff of steam rising and an erect, earnest little figure in a broad-brimmed black hat vehemently thumping out "The Land Where the Würzburger Flows." Coming closer, we picked out letters painted large on the boats: *Chaperon,* that was the steamer. And *Hollywood,* the floating theater. That seemed a silly name to give it.

As we scrambled aboard, a small freckled lad offered a handbill. This announced:

CLEAN—MORAL—REFINED
HOLLYWOOD
SHOWBOAT
Proudly Presents
"The Hoodlum"
In 3 acts
It's a Charming Story of Intrigue and Romance
and
HIGH CLASS VAUDEVILLE

We tucked it in a pocket, firmly determined to witness this prodigy in due time, and walked forward. Here was an entirely correct and conventional theater entrance, electric-light strings and all. Comedy grinned in a great crescent on one side of the lobby, Tragedy mourned on the other. Behind a little ticket window was B. F. Menke, the owner.

He was glad to see us. Indeed he was. Anybody that liked the river. We were to make ourselves at home, spend the afternoon with them, take dinner aboard, and have a look at their show to-night. Meet the cast.

"Boy!" For the freckled lad had softly followed us. "Call Mr. Cole."

Possibly every show-boat has its Mr. Cole, but it is extremely doubtful what this one would have done without him. For this young man, in addition to doing a stint at the calliope (in the profession, of course, it rhymes with "heliotrope") each day as they made a new landing, and for three fifteen-minute periods before every show, was the producer and also the juvenile lead. In addition he painted scenery and performed upon the slide trombone and the drums, by turns, during intermission. He is probably doing one or another of these things as you read this, for he told us he was content with show-boat life. Having come up from the "mud" shows, through a brief turn on the concert stage, to vaudeville, and during the war period having entertained soldiers in France, he knew what it was all about, and he was sticking with the river.

To be sure, it was an exacting life while the show was on. No performer, and not even a deck-hand or a fireman, was hired for duty unless he was especially

versatile. All the actors played in the orchestra before the show, and in the intermissions some went down the aisles selling candy; and some did vaudeville stunts between the acts.

The steamboat hands served as ushers, he told us as we crossed to the *Chaperon*. And the spirit of the theater followed us right into the boiler-room. Prowling noiselessly there, we were not at first observed, and this is what we heard:

"What did you do with that money?" This came threateningly from the vicinity of the coal-pile.

"What money?" from a coil of rope.

"You know very well what money. . . ."

It was just one of the scenes from the show-boat repertory, floating in the boiler-room. A deck-hand, after long months of ushering, would probably make as capable an understudy as anybody else. There was no room for dead timber on so compact a unit as a show-boat. The result was a closely shared life, and, it seemed to us, an unusually friendly one.

We were beginning to understand why this gifted young Jack of all trades who led us around liked the life. They worked hard while they worked, but in between there were always the long idle journeys down the bayous, from one isolated village to the next, and then up the great river.

In the star's dressing-room, which was also her state-room, of course, we found the women of the cast making fudge and pecan pralines over a portable alcohol stove, to send to the mother of one of them, back in a Pennsylvania village. While the sweet mixture bubbled they were studying the spring fashion cata-

logue of a mail-order house, just brought over the levee from the tiny post-office and store behind, and some one triumphantly discovered a neat little ensemble—"just the thing to wear around the boat, my dear." The woman who played heavies was the wife of Mr. Cole. Indeed, we discovered that all the actors came, as you might say, in pairs. It was an economy of space, an important consideration in a migratory theater, as he gravely explained. They were happy, because apparently they were gipsies by temperament or by long force of habit. There were few things they hadn't tried. Some, like Cole, had served their time in the old wagon shows, others had played in carnivals and circuses, and a few were vaudeville performers who had tired of hotels.

The fun began after dinner, when from the plantation houses far and wide, from the village store, and from the negro cabins, a flickering trail of lanterns and electric torches wound over the levee and down the *Hollywood* stage-plank. They were all there, and they were all in their seats early. Two of the actresses were selling candy from the stage long before curtain-time. Some boxes entitled the purchasers to prizes and soon laps bulged with Indian blankets and plumed kewpie dolls. Then the candy girls disappeared, turning up again almost immediately in the orchestra with the rest of the cast. Programs rustled to the strains of the Blue Danube and the audience puzzled as they read:

Is a Rube always a Rube?
Is a Crook always Bad?
Is a Suspect always Guilty?
Is a Hoodlum always a Hoodlum?

The curtain rang up on the melodrama that was to tell us all this. And from there on it was just a stampede of entertainment; and a stampede of appreciation and participation on our side of the footlights. "The entire scene of the play," we had read, "takes place in the gathering room of Peter Argyle's estate on the outskirts of New York City." Here were all of us, away down on the Mississippi River, privileged to look in on that magnificent gathering room and the goings on—"gripping, full of heart interest, love and devotion, and chuck-full of good clean comedy"—of its metropolitan habitués. It was immense. We hooted, clapped, booed, wept in sudden oases of silence, stamped, almost fainted of laughter. All of us, the country lawyer and his wife and the troop of youngsters seated, seriatim, between them, the village idiot, the cotton-pickers, were having the time of our lives.

Afterward, the cast had coffee, made over the same alcohol stove, in one of the state-rooms, and together we swapped stories about the river, for many of their habitual stands had been our mooring-places. There was an air of leisure and easy friendliness, a ruminative pulling at pipes and sipping at cups. Another day was over, another evening of strenuous, highly coöperative, nervous work was done. The night could be as long as they chose, as long as their stories and ours would make it. For them it did not matter; the steamboat would be on its way by dawn, and when they awakened it might be puffing them along fifty miles upstream from here. Meanwhile there were guests, who lived on the river like themselves. The coffee-pot was passed around again.

An imperative call came then for Cole, a call from up forward where the "boss" had his room:

"'Casey Jones' on the calliope! Give us 'Casey Jones'!"

Cole leaped to his feet, snatched up his big black hat, necessary to the correct execution of this rôle, and was bounding across to the steamboat, up through the moonlight to her Texas deck. The shrill, insistent notes of "Casey Jones" sprang out over the midnight river, so shrill, so gay, they almost drowned out an undertone of rhythmic splashing. Leaning over the rail, we saw, sharp against dark water, the sprinkled lights of the *Belle*. Her captain was a friend of the show-boat owner; this was a greeting. She passed us close, and as the last notes of the ballad died, gave us her salute of three crisp blasts. Then three more as she splashed on up the channel.

It was time for us to be going, too, to be saying good-by. Strange how hard it was sometimes to break off a chance meeting. We'd never see each other again, of course, but we'd all talked together over coffee and tobacco, and in some kind of way we'd become friends.

They leaned over the rails with their flash-lights to watch us untie the *Salamander*. The rising moon, just slanting over the "floating palace," cut out their silhouettes, shouting and laughing good-by, as we looked back. We sped off then over the dark water, around the island, and down to our silent bayou.

The day came when we had to follow the river again. In some subtle way the endless flow of the river, down toward the Gulf, pricked the dreaming idleness,

urged us on to go see what lay below. The shanty-boat must become a vagrant once more. And so one early hazy morning we undid the ropes, pulled up the stage-plank, and pushed out from little Bayou Cooper.

Chapter XXIX

THE NEW SOUTH

ABOVE Baton Rouge the river broadened and its banks became civilized. Tangled swamps were gone and the cropped levees lay close by the verge. Behind them showed the roofs of plantation houses, planned to overlook the river in the days before the high levees; shut off now. Or sometimes we saw only the dark green dome of a grove of live-oaks hiding a roof.

A high, narrow wedge of a vessel was coming toward us from the distance and as she came closer the skipper veered over to give her a wide berth. This was a steamship come up from the Gulf and the ocean beyond. She was riding light now, for her red water-line was high up above the surface of the river and her white bridge towered over us. She flew a Danish flag. Just below, a fleet of sea-going ships flying the Union Jack lay along shore, taking oil.

We knew we were down in the lower delta now. For these must be tankers that came up from the Gulf through the last three-hundred-mile stretch of the Mississippi to the refineries along the way, making one great harbor of the river from here on down. They'd probably be with us the rest of our way. These were steam*ships*. The steam*boats* were old friends by now.

They were the shallow-hulled wooden paddle-wheelers with the high rickety superstructures, used to push barges along the river, and a last handful of them to carry freight and a few passengers, like the *Tennessee Belle*. A boat belonged on the river, a ship on the sea; and the ship came up this last stretch of the Mississippi only as it might come up a city harbor. We were getting on! Salt-water vessels were our neighbors now.

We were looking for a mooring, for there were friends in Baton Rouge. It seemed best for the Ark to be tied out of the way of the ships, and as well out as possible. Just above the city docks a small canal emptied into the river and with some relief we turned the shanty-boat in and rode up a short distance, until we felt quite safe. This was the place for a domestic little outfit like ours. The Ark blocked most of the canal with its broad beam, but the small waterway did not look as if it were used for navigation of any importance and so we made fast in peace. Planted on the mud bank below us we saw a large yellow shanty-boat calling itself the LONE ★. We were in good company!

It was something to have come through to Baton Rouge. Now there was only that long, continual harbor between us and New Orleans. We would make it, all right; we would probably make the rest if we had come this far. We were proud of the Ark as she lay here this evening.

In the morning there were the friends, who gave us strange things for breakfast. We had a clabber that we ate with sugar and cream and called "cream

The steamboat *Chaperon* had pushed the *Hollywood* up the river

cheese"; and with the hot cakes there was a pungent black fluid, "la cuite," the syrup derived in the early stages of refining sugar.

Miss Nancy and Miss Jo drove us all about to see the town and we stared our fill at palm-trees. Then we went to see the bone of contention in this countryside. It was the new university campus. The trouble seemed to be that the style of these buildings had been cut out of whole cloth from the missions of Southern California, and this was an outrage to the Louisiana tradition. Still, the buildings looked to us fairly cool and picturesque; and certainly they were less disturbing than the ruby-tipped battlements of the state capitol, which March Twain long ago diagnosed as having been caught from Sir Walter Scott.

It occurred to us, though, that the embroidered capitol had been a true enough expression of one devious element of the old South, that flowery romance. We thought they had had better sense now in building the university, even if the style was borrowed. They had outgrown the old college, parts of which were very beautiful. The choicest was a pentagon of four white-colonnaded buildings about a green, the fifth side open to the river. Long ago this had housed an army post and then for years it served the university. Now there was a need for more space. But on the new campus it seemed to us the builders had sacrificed their own tradition only because in this case it was practical to do so. The mission style was cheaper and better adapted to the large scale.

Then we remembered that the first capitol of Wisconsin had had a false front. It was only a one-story

frame shack at the cross-roads, but if you were standing down by the front door and looked up you might think there was two stories' worth of business to be done for the new commonwealth. It wasn't true, of course. Up there in the back valley, though, they had a long way to go before they could catch up with the South and the East, and they argued that a little pretension would speed growth. But, then, when Wisconsin could afford a first-rate capitol building, something to do the State proud and properly express its growing importance, what did they put up? A splendid, inefficient modification of the national capitol, something of undeniable importance but of no significance and very little use.

Of course in Wisconsin there hadn't been much individual tradition to sacrifice. The upper-valley background was negative, belonging to nobody in particular and manifesting nothing special, we thought now. We had seen serene New England farm-houses scattered over the hillsides, and villages lifted from Andersen and Grimm. An old-style French church, a Virginia colonnade—such things occurred and then in time disappeared. We thought we could guess why.

The civilization of the South had crystallized before the Civil War, New England was in its ascendancy, and people were beginning to talk about New York. But about that time the upper valley was just getting some notion of how much there was to be done. And when they were ready to enjoy some of the fruits of a generation of labor and haste, great avenues of communication and transportation were coming into working order. Ideas, fashions, amusements were

passed across the continent from hand to hand. Still malleable and by no means conscious of any special trend, the Middle West accepted, and flowed into the general current. Over the good hard roads the farmers' wives were now motoring to cities and towns to buy what the magazines told them to buy, and if there was the basis for a tradition, nobody had had time to find out what it was.

Down here it was a different story. In the South one class had had the time and, because of a peculiar economic arrangement, the resources, to develop something all its own. They had their architecture and a charming way of life. Women were beautiful and sometimes interesting, and there was leisure for conversation, music, long letters, and all the small arts. Plantation owners rode to the Civil War as to a crusade, on race-horses or in carriages; the overseers and their sons went on mules; slaves walked. Life was ordered, static.

But now they were beginning to think that they had missed something and they were in a fever to catch up. It gave the old town a restless, mixed feeling. Some people were for bringing in more factories, in addition to the refineries, with more employees to trade in more shops on main street. Again there was a sense of the "new South" simmering. But, at the same time, there were the people who jealously guarded the traditions that were peculiarly theirs and threw their weight against any deviation.

We were less disturbed by the university buildings than by another kind of imitativeness. It seemed that the boys and girls who had raised the best half-acres

of cotton and corn were rewarded by the State with an excursion to Chicago. If this meant anything it meant, we thought, that Milly Robotham and Philippe Muras would come home to Tensas and Evangeline parishes with unquenchable yearnings for more rides on elevated trains, more afternoons in opulent picture-houses, more glimpses from sky-scraper towers, and considerably less appreciation of the value of cotton and corn. Most likely there was much to be learned from Chicago, but it would be cruel to expect a small boy to recognize it on a week's spree. He would see everything else first. And he was in danger of losing sight of a great deal that was important about Louisiana.

Damn-Yankees we were; still, we hoped that all of the beautiful old buildings that survived might linger so long as there was the slightest use for them. But we felt that if there were eventually to be some kind of harmony among places like this and Cape Girardeau and Guttenberg, instead of a standardization, it would not be first of all because certain old-time customs, quaint ideas, or even charming buildings of two hundred years ago had managed to keep a toe-hold against a rising current. We were not sure what the answer was, but we thought it needed more than this.

Meanwhile the conflict of transition down here was disturbing. We felt that we had happened to step on the scene at the moment when the leopard was preparing to change his spots, and he was restless, not sure what the new color was going to be or whether he would like it once it was on him.

Because there was so much going on or about to go

on there was a great deal of conversation, and that was one thing the life on the river had supplied only at the rarest intervals so far. There were parties and excursions and always talk. We were liking Baton Rouge.

One of the best things about it was Lyle Saxon, who somehow seemed to have gathered up in his mind most of this curious ferment and was making sense of it. He had written of the Mississippi River and two books about the far South. This was home for him. There were evenings when he came down to the shanty-boat, while we were becoming friends. One such night we had been talking about the river.

He said:

"Of course you are going to write a book about it?"

We hadn't thought of it. But we did begin to think about it then.

When the Ark put out into the river again, Miss Nancy was aboard. It was the first time we had had a passenger. She left us at Plaquemine, and then we headed down once more, with the huge ships, nearer and nearer to New Orleans.

Chapter XXX

NOTHING BUT THE RIVER

FROM where the shanty-boat lay, that night, we could see the sky glowing dimly over the horizon. For we were almost there. We could have made it that very evening, perhaps, but at the last something was holding us back. New Orleans would be the journey's end, and for a long time now the river had been flowing before our eyes, and sometimes in our dreams at night. We must have another quiet evening along the way before it was over.

For there was something about the river that sooner or later left its mark. The men and women who knew it had told us, when we happened to catch them right—after sunset, say, when it had quieted down and was running along as smooth and still as though nothing had happened or ever would happen again. The river would do that after the wind had gone down. Maybe an up-stream gale had been lashing it to foam since before sun-up, the waves breaking as high as houses amidstream and hammering the shore. The river people had more sense than to put out in their little gasboats when it was acting up like that, but they could not ignore it and it made them restless. After dusk though, as likely as not, the wind would die down; and

Adam had lived on the river all his life

if it didn't happen to be raining, the river would lie there shining in the last glow of the sun and as good as gold. Then they'd talk to you.

No matter how well you had handled the river in your time, to suit your needs; no matter how you'd fought with it and come off with something to show (you might have made a living from the wreckage and driftwood it carried down in high water or by fishing for cat and goo and shrimp) ; in the end something got you. And that didn't mean necessarily that it rose and smote. It was in a calm that it was most terrible. There was poison in its calm, the river people would tell you if you happened to catch them right.

There was this curious little community that we had stumbled upon by chance in the afternoon. As we were turning the Ark in, it looked like the ordinary cluster of shacks and shanty-boats, up along the water side of the levee. But something tragic had been happening here, and old Adam Rutherford believed the river was really to blame.

Adam sat on the porch with us for some time after we had made fast below his own beached boat. He had lived here a long while and he had seen a checkered parade of squatters come in, live for a season or two, and go away. There had been gipsies, a dope-fiend once, loafers, and harmless fishermen like himself. Mostly they were like him, he said, except that they never could stay in one place.

It must be the river always flowing along down that got them, as it got Mattie and Steve, he believed. Because you'd come to a colony along the batture somewhere, one autumn, and see half a dozen house-boats

flourishing. They were beached, of course, and raised on pilings to save the trouble of minding ropes in rough weather. There were vegetable gardens and chickens and goats, and sometimes a tame muskrat for the kids to play with. It looked permanent. Curtains were at the windows and bright washings out on the lines. The women were gossiping over the fence or perhaps arranging to walk over to market together. The river flowed on in front of them all the time, but you almost forgot it, looking at the homelike little colony.

Then the following June you came back, Adam said, and maybe all but one of the house-boats were gone and there was nothing to show that they ever had been there. The remaining one was empty; or if there was a family hanging on alone, the cabin was in need of paint, the screens were broken, and some of the windows, too. The children were untidy and there weren't any chickens. The whole thing had collapsed.

The others had drifted on down-river. Or maybe some one had offered one of the men a job, a real job with a regular pay envelope, in some town, and he'd moved his family back behind the levee. Well, he'd probably be on the river again some day.

He took us up to see the Clarks, by and by, and they were talking about the same thing. But they seemed to have made themselves comfortable and they certainly looked settled. That, Mrs. Clark said, was only since one-armed Doc had come to live with them. He did all the work. And, then, Mrs. Clark's brother was Joey Phillipo, the jockey, who had all kinds of money and sometimes came over to visit them in his

sporty clothes and new shoes, and that made a difference.

Mrs. Clark herself did a pretty good business with her eggs. There were always people up from New Orleans, some just to look at the river and then drive off again, but a lot of them to throw away pieces of mirrors they had broken. Throwing them into flowing water broke the bad-luck spell. So Mrs. Clark sold her eggs to the people who came over from town.

Naturally, she couldn't afford to feed any of the eggs to her own family—"that bunch," she called them —and so she managed to make as much money as they needed. One of the children was delicate and smaller than a brother who was two years younger, but Mrs. Clark laughed and shrugged her shoulders and said she guessed little Sidney would be a jockey like his uncle some day, and that seemed to make it all right about her selling all the eggs.

Doc was the one who made things hum, though. Before, when he was still with Mattie and Steve, over the river, there was many a time when Mrs. Clark's back was aching, what with the stove wood to get and all the chores around the yard. Mr. Clark had been a deep-sea diver by trade, and there wasn't much business in deep-water diving up here on the river, so he spent most of his time building skiffs and shanty-boat hulls out of driftwood, and then forgetting them and starting more and forgetting them. He wasn't much of a hand about the house or the yard, for all he was such a strapper.

But Doc! With his one good arm and his stub he could row a boat as well as Frank Clark or anybody

else. And he was so grateful for his board and a place to sleep that he did nearly all the chores; and not only that, but every morning he rowed up-river a couple of miles for salvage. He never came back without a coil of rope or maybe a wire cable or an abandoned shrimp-trap. And you should have seen him swing an ax to the stove wood, with that one good arm of his. Stella Clark gave him a place to put up his tent in the yard, but in high water, when the yard was flooded, she let him spread out his mattress on the kitchen floor.

There was no question about it, Doc was worth his board even if he wasn't very sociable; and it didn't matter to the Clarks or anybody else where he came from or how he had lost his arm. There were a number of stories about that, of course, but Doc never talked, so nobody really knew whether he had been shot in a fight and the arm had had to be cut off, or it had just got caught in a saw in a mill somewhere. All anybody knew for certain about Doc was that the Clarks had inherited him from Steve and Mattie, over the river, who had been friends of theirs in a way.

Not that Doc ever talked about Mattie and Steve. People didn't even know where he was, the night of the accident; he wasn't here to-night. They just knew that he hadn't been around. He'd pulled up the river to look at his fish-nets, perhaps. And if he knew where Mattie finally went, he didn't confide it to any one, and she of course hadn't talked then. Mrs. Clark hadn't even known that she'd sold out, until one day Adam Rutherford said he saw her boat being towed down into Harvey Canal, behind a little gas-launch, and then Doc came over to live with the Clarks.

Mrs. Clark told us it was no wonder to her, at all, what had happened over there; she should think they'd have died of loneliness. As for the Clarks, they had something else to think about than the river and how the hens were laying or how the fish were biting. Mrs. Clark got down to the pictures about once a month, herself, and then she'd come home and tell the neighbors the stories, and sometimes she could do the theme songs for them and she remembered many of the jokes from the vaudeville acts. And at the time of Mardi Gras, when the season was high, Joey would get a job for Mr. Clark—taking tickets at the track over by New Orleans. Then Mrs. Clark would shine his shoes and take out his suit and wash it and iron it for him and he'd go out to the races for a couple of days. And when he came back he'd tell her about the people he'd seen—the mayor and a lot of high society people, and once the governor was there. And if he played his pay and lost it—well, it didn't matter particularly, because any money Mr. Clark ever made was money found, anyway. It gave them something to talk about and they had a real personal interest in what the newspapers had to say about the track; aside from Joey's being a jockey, of course. So they had something to live for. But Mattie and Steve, over there on the other side! Well, Mrs. Clark didn't see how they'd stood it as long as they had.

Adam Rutherford, though, had happened to see Mattie the night before she pulled out; and if he wasn't telling Mrs. Clark, he had a pretty good idea of what it was all about. And this is about the way he told us he thought it happened:

The worst of it was that nobody at all lived on their side of the river—until Doc came along, of course. But Doc kept to himself. He wasn't any company. Steve had had some kind of idea that the shrimp beds would be better there, a mile and a half upstream from the colony and across. A long time ago he'd put in a couple of spells with the government crews on channel- and levee-repair, and he knew a lot about eddies and boils and cross-currents. So he figured out what was the best place for them to settle down on the basis of that. He hadn't talked about it for a long time now, but that was the reason they were where they were.

And it worked out all right for a while. Mattie and Steve got along fine together and they didn't miss having people to talk to. Then when Doc came along, down on his luck (Steve had known him once on one of the crews, when he still had his other hand) and they decided to let him live near by in his tent and sometimes take his meals with them—well, that was a change, too. But by and by Doc got to be just like Steve, in a way; Mattie got so used to him that she didn't really know he was there.

Steve hardly talked to her at all. Unless she picked a quarrel with him. And sometimes she had to do that, just for something to say! Lately it would be about the gipsies that lived above the shanty-boat colony over the river. You couldn't call them gipsies to their faces, but that was what every one said they were, just the same. And sometimes when Steve took the fish over to the landing, for the boat to pick them up, he'd stop and have a drink of something with them,

instead of just visiting Adam or the Clarks as he usually did.

And Mattie didn't like the gipsies any more than anybody else did. They said Clothilde wasn't properly married to that good-for-nothing she lived with. Adam Rutherford knew them from away back when they used to live on the bayou, and he said Philip's real wife was making her living by taking in washing in Plaquemine, and had been for twenty years, ever since she left him. But Clothilde and Philip had a daughter, Carrie, and she was an actress. She ran away from home when a floating palace stopped at Harvey Canal one early spring, and went along with it. Nobody could blame her much for leaving such a home. And people like that! Why, Clothilde and her man hadn't even bothered to build a hull under their shack. When the high water came it would run right in on their floor. In the 1927 flood they had to put up a tent on the levee and stay there for a couple of months. That was the kind of people they were.

So when Mattie found out that Steve sometimes stopped and took a drink with them, she'd pick a quarrel with him about it. Not that she wanted to quarrel with him, especially, or even that she really minded so very much what he did. Oh, she minded; but if he'd told her about it first, instead of her having to guess it—well, it would have been all right. And even at that, she just didn't know what it was that made her so mad.

But when she'd been home alone all day and got the work done and the shanty-boat slicked up, and then sundown came and dinner was on the stove, and Steve

didn't come back, and she'd think of him sitting around in that dirty old shack across the river—well, it just made her blood boil sometimes, and she couldn't help it if she tore into him the moment she heard his skiff pulling up outside.

Now that the fishing season was almost over, and it was too early for shrimp, Steve didn't go over the river so much. And, in a way, that made it worse than it was before, because he didn't have enough to do. Oh, he'd tinker around a little bit—at the hull one day, at the screens the next—and he spoke of giving the cabin another coat of paint. But, as a matter of fact, he did hardly a thing, and he was often in the way when Mattie was cleaning up or trying to hang her wash. Then she would look at Steve, puttering aimlessly at his sawhorse, perfectly happy, and she would look at the river and back at the tangle of willows behind, and the whole thing would make her mad.

There was nothing behind their cabin boat but this mass of young willows so thick you could hardly push your way through them; and behind that, a jungle of vines and moss. Well, there was a road, a good way back, but it was all you could do to get there, and it didn't go anywhere in particular when you did. So they were hemmed in between the river and the willows.

Once, about this time, there was a day that was so hot and close they thought they'd pretty nearly go crazy. It was trying to brew a storm but couldn't quite make it. They'd had dry weather for over a week—hot, clean air—and that was unnatural in itself, at this time of year; you knew it couldn't last. And then, instead of blowing up in a storm, it turned

muggy and thick. It was all wrong. Mattie and Steve sat around, waiting for it to break, but it wouldn't break. Sometimes a little breeze would come across the river and seem to lift the air like a curtain for a minute, and they'd hold up their heads and sniff at the dampness, but the breeze would die out and nothing would come of it. The air kept getting thicker; it seemed as if the sun were always hotter when it shone through a film of fog, and it got stickier every minute. Their nerves were tense for the gale all day, but it wouldn't break.

There was no relief in looking at the river. It had been pretty high this winter, but it was beginning to fall again and it had a kind of scum on it. The shore where it had been receding was so much soft mud, and now and then a bottle would stick out where it had been thrown when the water was higher. It hadn't been carried away; it just stuck there in the mud, to show up again when the river went down. And you couldn't keep a house clean, with the water going down. Steve tracked mud every time he came in. Mattie washed it up and then Steve came into the house again. He would try to scrape it off on the step, but you couldn't scrape that mud. It was like glue. In the beginning Steve had hoped Mattie would get used to it and let it dry on the floor; then walking on it would loosen it and you could sweep it right out. But that was a long time before and Mattie had never got used to it. So he tried to scrape his shoes.

Night came and still nothing happened. They were sitting out on the porch and Mattie's head was aching. She was dead tired, but somehow she couldn't just sit

in her chair and let go. She was still waiting for something. Steve, too. He kept slapping at the bugs that came in through the holes in the screens, but not as if he really expected to get any of them. They didn't know where Doc was and didn't care. He didn't sit with them much of the time. He kept by himself, over in his tent, or he had something or other to do. He always had something to do.

They were sitting out there together, Mattie and Steve, just watching the river go by and not saying anything. A tanker passed, out in the channel—a red and a green light forward, and a faint yellow sparkle amidships—going up to Baton Rouge after oil, you couldn't tell where from. Sweden, perhaps, or some place in South America. Then later, hours later, a packet splashed by, the *Ouachita* on her up trip.

Well, there'd been a boat, maybe once, maybe twice, in the evening. And that was all that had happened, except that the air had kept getting closer around them all the time. It seemed as if nothing ever were going to happen but the river, the huge muddy river everlastingly flowing from away up-country down to the Gulf, till it was no wonder if they went crazy.

Mattie got up at last and walked over to the railing. Her hands were sticky and she wiped them mechanically on her apron. She looked out at the sky. There was nothing up there but the moon, looking sick through a thin fog. Not a breath of air.

She turned and went into the cabin. Just as she found a match, Steve came in too, wandering aimlessly after her. He didn't know what to do, either. Well, the match was damp and the tip of it smeared out on the

sandpaper without a spark. Mattie tried another and another. Steve came over and took the match-box away from her.

He put the lamp over close where it shone on her hair, crisp and brown and streaked with gray. He must have made up his mind to something then, because he walked over to the shelf by the stove, got down a big gray-granite pitcher, and took himself off to the shed behind. He was slow, everything he did was slow. But he came back finally and the pitcher was full. He put it on the table next to the lamp and got two cups. Then he poured out two full cups of the corn liquor.

Mattie lifted her head just enough to see what he had been doing. Her eyes, lifeless and dull now, looked at the cups and then at him. Her face was vacant as she reached over for hers.

An hour must have passed. And the more Steve drank, the better he began to feel. He took off his shoes and he opened his shirt clear down to the waist. Then he rolled up his sleeves almost to his shoulders. He'd tilt way back in his chair and wave his cup over his head, and he'd say:

"Well, Mattie, old girl, here's how!" Or, "Bottoms up, sugar; take it while you can get it!"

And she'd take it. But it seemed as if the more she drank, the stiller she felt. She sat there in her chair and never moved a muscle in her body except to drink down the liquor when Steve poured it out for her. And her eyes didn't seem to move, either. They were looking off at the wall somewhere—whatever there was to see on the wall. And her mouth, when she'd licked her

lips, would set right back into the same close groove as before.

"Come on, lil old Maggie, have another drink," he'd say to her. "That's what's the trouble with the old gal, you know. . . . Poor thing, she's thirsty! Idea of letting lil ole Maggie go thirsty . . . Here you are, honey; drink her down."

He'd take his and down it at a gulp, and then he'd blow out in front of him, and wipe his mouth on his arm, and slam the cup down on the table like the good fellow he was. It didn't take Mattie any longer to finish hers, but she never seemed to be able to take her eyes off that wall and she never cracked a smile.

It didn't bother Steve any, though. He was having a real good time. He got himself a good-sized plug of tobacco and settled down to make a night of it. Mattie's shoulder twitched when he began to suck on the tobacco, but when he leaned down absently and spat across the floor, she turned on him suddenly as if all hell were let loose in her eyes.

"You quit that," she said, slowly. "You lay off spittin' on my floor."

But Steve was leaning way back in his chair now, waving his cup in the air like a happy child, and he didn't seem to notice. He didn't even hear when she said something about gipsy ways. So it was the most natural thing in the world for him, a little later, to lean over and send another beautiful spit skidding across the floor along the trail of the first.

Mattie looked at him for a minute as if she weren't sure of what she had seen. Then she turned away and began staring off across the room again. Her face

seemed to have gone to sleep. But it hadn't, because presently she got up and walked to the corner where Steve kept his shot-gun. She walked straight to the corner, without looking at him at all, and picked up the gun and carried it over to her chair. It was too heavy for her and she didn't know how to handle it, but Steve was busy enjoying himself on his side of the table and he took no notice of her. She fumbled intently with it for a minute, and then she looked at him.

"I got half a mind to turn this here thing on you," she said.

Steve looked at her then and he gave her an airy gesture.

"Go ahead, honey. What the hell! This one's on me."

She heard. She fumbled with the lock, but it was hard to cock.

Steve leaned forward obligingly.

"Hell, baby! this way."

He took it from her, slid the bolt, and handed it back. Then he sat back in his chair, pulled down his shirt sleeves, and buttoned the cuffs. He buttoned up his shirt all the way to the neck and smoothed out a few wrinkles in his trousers. At last he looked up with a beautiful grin. He was ready.

"All right now, honey; shoot. But make it snappy. You can't expect me to set here lookin' pleasant all night."

Mattie was absorbed in her gun. She lifted it in a sort of trance, her finger poised to pull, and she started to sight along the barrel. But when she saw Steve sitting up there, waiting for her, with that idiotic smile

fixed on his face, something happened. She began to tremble all over just as if she had a chill, and she started to lower the gun, her eyes popping at him.

The report of the gun, like thunder and lightning in her own ears, ended that.

Funny thing, though—he didn't want her to touch him. Of course he was conscious. You couldn't knock out a river-rat like Steve with a little buckshot in the leg. He just lay there doubled up under the table, clutching at his leg with one hand and waving Mattie away with the other. Waving her away as if he was just tired of looking at her and didn't want to have to tell her so. Mattie had to push the table away to get real close to him; and by that time, of course, there was blood all over the floor.

Steve got up, finally. He pulled himself up next to the table. Yes, he pushed Mattie right away and stood up by himself, not saying a word to her yet. Mattie was so horrified, her throat seemed to have dried up. When she saw that he was going to walk outside all by himself and didn't mean to let her help him at all, she just backed off against the wall and stared at him, her shoulders shaking and her eyes full of terror. Terror of being left alone, in a way. He wouldn't have anything to do with her, no matter how much he needed her—that was the thing.

She should have followed him, all the same. He wasn't in his right mind. No man was in his right mind with his thigh full of shot. She should have gone right out after him and seen what he was up to. There was no telling how long it was until she finally snapped out of it and realized that she'd let him drag himself out-

side alone in that condition. Anyway, at last she broke out of the house, yelling his name.

"Steve! Steve! Oh my God! Steve!" She was just running around in circles, yelling his name. It was a wonder Doc wouldn't have heard her, wherever he was. Well, he was probably up-river on some business or other. At least, he didn't answer and neither did Steve.

She found him finally. He was slumped in the mud at the edge of the water. Well, he was lying sidewise, really. The place where the shot had struck him, just above his right knee, was under water. Evidently he had an idea he'd wash the wound out in the river, not thinking about how filthy the water there was. Wash it and stop the blood. Well, it was the only thing he could think of. They said at Charity Hospital that Steve should have known better than that, but those nurses didn't understand that Steve and Mattie and everybody else in the river had been drinking such water ever since they were born, and just scooping it up to wash their faces without even bothering to let the mud settle in a bucket.

Nobody really knew what Mattie went through, the rest of that night. Why, she probably didn't even remember it, herself, as far as that went. But over at the colony, they heard her coming with him. Mrs. Clark said it was going on five in the morning. She hadn't been sleeping very well on account of little Sidney's having a chest cold, and she heard the oars creaking, so she went down to the edge and looked out over the water. Mattie saw her and called. It wasn't much above a whisper, Mrs. Clark said; but she waited, and

sure enough, the skiff pulled up, with Mattie at the oars, her hair streaming over her face and deep lines around her mouth. Steve was folded up on the seat in the stern.

She must have been glad to see Mrs. Clark, but she didn't say anything. She dropped her oars and then pulled up the boat with Steve still in it, hardly paying any attention to Mrs. Clark's efforts to help or to her questions.

When they had made the boat fast, Mattie looked at her.

"Where's the doctor?" she said, as if she had expected him to be there waiting for her.

This was where Frank came in. Mrs. Clark woke him up and he knew what to do. He slipped on his trousers and beat it over the levee to a road-house he knew about and got the people there to call up Charity. Mattie might have had some such idea in her mind when she started out in that boat, but by the time she'd rowed him over the river, and a mile and a half down, she didn't remember anything about that. So Frank was good for something that time, anyway.

There wasn't very much more. An ambulance came and they took Steve. They let Mattie ride along with him, too, although he wouldn't have known the difference. He must have passed out way back, when she first dragged him into the skiff. She stuck with him, though; and the next morning, when he came to for a few minutes, he wasn't holding anything against her any more. Maybe he never had really done that; only the shock of it, at first, unbalanced him. Mattie and Steve always hit it off pretty well.

But of course, with gangrene from the dirty river water in his wound, there wasn't much chance for him. In fact, the doctor said there was only one possible chance and that would be from a blood transfusion. Of course Mattie said for them to take her blood. The doctor didn't like the idea of doing that, because he said she was so frail. Didn't they have anybody else who would do it for them, anybody who was strong and wouldn't miss it? Mattie thought of Doc, but she didn't know where he was, and with his arm gone, and all, it didn't seem to her it would be right to ask him. Adam was too old. Then she thought of Frank Clark.

The health officer went over the levee and told Frank what was wanted. There was some difficulty getting started, because Mrs. Clark and Frank both thought if he was going to the hospital in the city he ought to wear the suit he wore when he took tickets down at the track. But the officer told them not to mind that now, so they compromised by Frank's putting on his race-track tie right with his work shirt, and the coat of the suit, to cover some of the patches on his work trousers.

They took him to the laboratory, looking like that and feeling flattered and heroic, most likely. But the minute his eyes lit on the rows and rows of nickel and polished steel in the glass cabinets, his face turned yellow. Well, all the nerve ran out of him like sweat on a hot day. Perhaps he had never been in a place like that before. Anyhow, he wouldn't let the doctor get near him. What they wanted at first, of course, was just to prick his ear for a sample, to see if he had the right

kind of blood to mix with Steve's. But he wouldn't let them even prick his ear. He turned around and headed for the door. And there was Mattie, standing in his way. Lord knew what he said to her, but she stepped aside and let him get out.

Well, you couldn't say that Steve would have lived even if Frank had given his blood. No need of being too hard on Frank, Adam said. But it was Mattie who finally gave the blood, of course, and maybe it was the wrong kind. Or maybe Steve was just bound to go off and nothing on earth could have stopped him.

They had a little funeral for him. And then one day Mattie came up to the colony and said good morning to Mr. Clark and Mrs. Clark, but that was all. She didn't stop to talk with them, but she did stay over for a little chat with Adam and told him the way of it. Then she pushed off her skiff from where she had beached it that night she carried Steve, and got in and pulled away. It happened to be a nice morning, with a faint dry haze over the sky, the kind that made a morning feel like dawn for hours and hours—almost until noon sometimes. That was the kind of day it was. It was cool again and the river was green and gold and still. But Mattie kept pulling on against the current, not taking much notice, and finally she crossed over to where her own shanty-boat was.

When Doc came back she told him she wanted to sell out, and by and by he heard of some trappers who came and made her a price on it. It was said to be a pretty fair price. So Mattie took the money and her boat was let down into the water and towed away.

She went up-river somewhere, herself. She used to have kin up in Mississippi, Adam believed. Maybe that was where she went.

And then Doc came over to live with the Clarks.

Chapter XXXI

CARNIVAL

THIS was the day of Momus, Adam informed us, and the first day of the Mardi Gras festival. To the day, it was four months since we had cast off from the Minnesota Boat Works, and then we had thought vaguely that we should like to end with the carnival. Now, in spite of all the storms up the river, it was almost within reach. But this morning there had been no dawn, there was only a thick damp fog. New Orleans was said to be just about ten miles below; still, we might as well have been in St. Paul.

Our friends in the shanty-boat colony cheerfully predicted that the fog would lift before noon. It was the kind that did that; they said they could tell. And then we should still have time to see the first night parade. They told us we might run down to Nine Mile Point and tie on the east bank, at the foot of Carrollton Avenue. A street-car line ran close to the levee there. But we puttered about the boat, nervous and depressed, feeling as hopelessly remote from street-cars and avenues on this impenetrable gray morning as we had ever felt on the wildest and dreariest bend up above; for more than once we had seen fog hold over throughout the day. But just in case they were right, and it should clear in time, the mate laid out street clothes

and began to sew on a last button. The skipper tuned up the motor. We'd be ready any time the sun chose to break through.

And the fog did begin to lift a little at about eleven o'clock.

It was enough for us. Now the mate was standing impatiently on the guard with the pike-pole, ready to push off the moment the last line was loose. Stella and Frank Clark were standing on the bank with one-armed Doc, who had shown up from somewhere this morning. Adam helping the skipper with the lines, said that it would be dangerous to run too far below Nine Mile Point. There were eddies there, he explained with complicated gestures, and ferries were always crisscrossing, ships were pulling in and out of port. We must head in just across the river from the point, where there was a colony like this one.

Some one leaned out of a window and called:

"See you on Canal Street!"

Then the Ark bowled into a bank of luminous white mist which obliterated the shore behind, and the people. We could still hear their voices vaguely. In another moment we were coming out into bright sunlight. A slight breeze was hustling the haze this way and that as the warm sun ate it up. It was going to be all right. We'd be there in plenty of time for the Momus parade and the beginning of the carnival. The river had looped its leisurely miles through wild country, back there, but now at the end it was taking us to this glamorous city at the height of its most deplorable gaiety! We wondered where the river preacher kept himself at such a time as this.

The Ark never seemed more obedient and capable than now, as it buzzed down its final complicated stretch of river. There was a long bend to the left and another to the right. The numbers on the channel lights—we had followed them down from the thousands—were dwindling away. Here was 7, and then 6, 5, and 4. Nine Mile Point came; that was Light 1, and the last. Below us, here, the river curved between two solid rows of docks and warehouses. A dozen or more derelict United States Shipping Board vessels, abandoned since the World War, lay chained to the bank around the point. Deeply laden tankers and cargo-ships steamed past us, up the river and down toward the Gulf. Many were moored along the docks. It was the beginning of the New Orleans harbor.

Just above a big oil-dock we saw a cluster of shanty-boats perched high on the batture, and a few small craft tied in the water below them. The Ark headed over. And soon—we worked fast now—it was tied, too, between the *Polly,* a river cruiser from St. Louis, and a diminutive green shanty-boat.

We stood in the mud, New Orleans mud, and sniffed what smelled suspiciously like a salt-water breeze. This was journey's end for the good old Ark. It was lying snug in port at last, after months of slow-poking through the middle of the country. Sunny Minnesota hillsides that had flaunted the purple and gold of Indian summer as we passed by were deep in snow now, the Mississippi itself was ice-bound a long way down. Clammers, log-rafters, fishermen, river-rats of every hue and caste, cotton-planters, pecan-growers, escaped convicts, and gentlemen of dubious leisure had

been our companions as the river unrolled. The Ark itself had had a close call or two and we had been taught by the river to take nothing for granted. But here it was, on this warm February afternoon, safely moored in the thick of the New Orleans wharves, snug from wind or current. Now there was only the soft, salty breeze from the Gulf of Mexico.

The skipper hurried into his other clothes. We walked up the levee, and down there below us lay a city of bright-green lawns, palm-trees, and japonicas. As we came down the rough, uneven side of the levee, we passed some other immigrants, a little like ourselves. There was a mustard-yellow house-wagon, really a cottage perched on a truck, bearing a Saskatchewan license. Beside it was another, even more commodious, with two canary cages in a window. This one had come down to the carnival from North Dakota.

The St. Charles Avenue car was crowded with people going downtown for the carnival. They were all talking to one another like old friends. The skipper held a long conversation with a delicate old lady in a discreet gray suit who was all in a flutter because her daughter was to be a maid of honor in the court of the Queen of Carnival, at the Rex Ball on Tuesday. She was going down now to buy a last silver spangle for the gown. The gentleman who sat beside the mate courteously offered his newspaper so that she might read the full program for the six days of hilarity that would usher in Lent. It was a family street-car to-day.

It was carrying us down a long curving boulevard lined with giant palm-trees and rounded live-oaks and magnolias. Poinsettias were blooming before pictur-

esque and comfortable homes, and from nearly every veranda the purple-and-gold banners of Rex, the King of Carnival, fluttered.

But it was not until we came near Lee Circle, nearly downtown now, that the Mardi Gras spirit really flaunted itself. Behind the iron picket fences of many of the broad white dwellings bleachers had been set up and draped with bunting, from which friends could see the parades. The sidewalks swarmed with people, more than they could hold, and many wandered idly up and down the gutters, careless of hurrying automobiles. The air was full of excited chatter, as gay and fluttering as the flags that hung from the trolley guy-wires and the telephone poles. Balloon men and hawkers of noise-making devices were threading through.

At the next stop the crowd swallowed us. The narrow sidewalk was loud with racketeers, and choked with the knots that gathered around one pitch and another. Tex Murillo was winding long pink scarfs of cotton candy about a stick in one tiny doorway. Florida Kid was blowing up whistling balloons, a full yard long, in another. Somebody elbowed his way through, nonchalantly playing a zither. Everywhere people paused to watch and exchange a word or two, and then slowly moved along again, staring all the while.

Hotel entrances were clogged with motor-cars from North Carolina, California, and Mexico, unloading ladies and gentlemen with long, shiny suitcases and duffle-bags. People were massed in the lobbies—gaudy, elegant, and florid people from all parts of the world,

it seemed. Now an aquiline Creole lady picked her way along, escorting what was apparently the Old Lady from Dubuque; and off in a corner sat a muscular old man with a pointed beard and wild white hair, who looked as if he had recently come from discovering glaciers in Canada. Peals of laughter kept breaking over the humming crowd.

Oh yes, we had come at the right time! We wandered slowly down the streets again, staring like everybody else, answering when we were spoken to, laughing with anybody that wanted to laugh; and so we crossed Canal Street and came down into the old French Quarter. We were tired now—for a whole new, unaccustomed world had been opening before us—and we stopped in somewhere for oysters and coffee. Then we strolled on again, lingering before old houses and shops with grilled iron galleries, a few of them built long ago by Spaniards, more by the French. Whenever we grew tired we stopped for coffee—thick chickory coffee that stained the cups.

But it was impossible, after all, to keep away from the river very long. We wanted to see how it looked downtown. At the foot of Canal Street we stopped, stared, and looked again. It was the steamer *Cape Girardeau!* Months ago we had seen her up the river, taking a load of pigs and crates and a handful of passengers. Now she was brightly lighted, people were moving through the companionway, and she flew the Rex banner astern.

We hurried aboard and found our old friend Mr. Street, the pilot. He told us the packet had brought down seventy-five carnival visitors on an excursion from

Cairo. The steamer *City of Cincinnati,* bound down the Ohio, was expected in the morning, with more guests from the North.

Our heads were fairly reeling when we came out on Canal Street again. The whole thoroughfare had been roped off now and cleared of traffic. Lights were blazing and people were massed behind the ropes, waiting for Momus and his court to make their appearance.

A far-away band was beginning to play as we hurried down a dark back street. We didn't want to miss anything! Into the hotel, then. And from its upper balcony we leaned down just in time to see a flaming snake move slowly toward us from the far end of the street, threading between the masses of waiting people. Louder, brighter, more fantastic it became as it drew near. It passed us in a long blaze of torch flares, papier-maché castles and waterfalls, scarlet satin, and rhinestones that glittered on the bosoms of masked creatures of mythology.

Down in the street again, we hurried after, darting through the crowd and ahead of the parade until we stood at the very edge, clasping the ropes. Once more it passed us, and this time the incredible floats towered slowly by, over our heads, between their escorts of hot, hissing torches. A masked faun leaned down and scattered a handful of shimmering glass jewels over the upturned faces.

From then on until the dim gray morning of Ash Wednesday there was no making sense out of anything, for we had found friends, and with them we went through the remaining five days of Mardi Gras through a haze of coffee and absinthe. At carnival-time

in New Orleans they saw that you got whatever you wanted; they found places for you on somebody's bleachers to see the parades of Comus and Proteus, and they saw that you had a look at one of the balls. The day of Mardi Gras itself they hustled you into dominoes and climbed on a truck with you, to follow the Rex parade in a giggling, idiotic jumble of merriment.

Then every one on the streets was masked and milkmen were joking on the curb with Daughters of the Confederacy. The editor of a Los Angeles newspaper was handing some passing stranger a rubber cigar and a youth who sometimes wrote somber articles on the art of the ballet was looking around everywhere for the ten-cent-store piano-player he had lost in the shuffle on Rampart Street somewhere. High on a mountain of oyster-shells, watching the negro Mardi Gras in the New Basin, a Spanish duenna was standing, in one white stocking and one black one. Other days of the year she was an authority on the short story in America. To-day she was ankle-deep in oysters, catching rubber cocoanuts as they were hurled from the triumphal barge of the Zulu King.

This was a hilarious place the shanty-boat had brought us to!

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